

# MIKE SHAYNE

## MYSTERY MAGAZINE



JANUARY 1985

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**DEATH TOPS THE CHARTS**  
by Brett Halliday

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## MYSTERY MAGAZINE

### DEATH TOPS THE CHARTS

by Brett Halliday

*The rock group was called DEATH—and it was living up to its name. Could Mike Shayne discover the killer—or would he become one of the victims?* 4

### NOVELETS

#### THE VERTEBRAE OF A

##### LONG SNAKE

Izak Bouwer ..... 46

#### THE ELEPHANT'S GRAVEYARD

James M. Reasoner ..... 67

### SHORT STORIES

#### THE BUS STOPS HERE

James McKimmey ..... 84

#### NIGHT SERVICE

William E. Chambers ..... 91

#### TOO MUCH SUN

Jerry Jacobson ..... 103

#### HOME PRESERVES

Charles Wagner ..... 108

#### BLACK AND WHITE

Evan Baldwin ..... 117

### FEATURES

#### PURLOINED LETTER

Richard Connolly ..... 113

#### 007 QUIZ

..... 119

#### MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAKERS

..... 122

#### STIFF COMPETITION (Book Reviews)

John Ball ..... 124

*Shayne felt acid in his stomach. The vacant eyes, the shaking, the sweat—it all nauseated him. But you couldn't escape it. It thrived as much in the stuccoed villas of the Beach as it did in tenements like Miami's Black Hole. The result was always the same—wasted lives, and death!*

# Death Tops The Charts

by **BRETT HALLIDAY**

DOES AN INSANE MAN, MIKE SHAYNE WONDERED, KNOW he's insane? Philosophical speculations, hell, anything more difficult than counting to ten, was impossible under these conditions. Besides, he knew he was nuts—for being here.

Lucy Hamilton thrust her head in his face so close he could smell her Charlie and feel her hot breath on his swarthy cheek. She shouted something.

"What?" he screamed back.

His secretary cupped her delicate hands over his right ear. Her dark hair brushing him, she yelled, "Are you having a good time?"

The detective drew another breath of marijuana-laced smoke and roared, "Hard not to."

She flashed her "I knew you would" grin and turned her attention away.

Swell, decided the redhead. Just what he needed. He could see Tim Rourke's story in tomorrow's edition of the *Miami Daily News*: GIDDY INVESTIGATOR NABBED IN BIG DRUG BUST. When questioned, the Magic City shamus refused to answer questions. "Yeah," the redhead later replied, "but that's only because the loud noise broke both my ear drums."

In front of him a kid who looked to Shayne like he had more pimples than smarts jumped up and began dancing on the seat. Another cart-wheeled down the aisle, leaving a trail of tell-tale red pills as he went.

As far as Shayne was concerned, the Orange Bowl, host to SuperBowls and NCAA Championships, had bottomed out. He noticed the water in the huge tank at the opposite end of the field was motionless. Even Flipper was stoned.

When he had arrived earlier in the evening to take his pert secretary-plus out for what he had thought would be a quiet little dinner for two, she had announced, "Have I got a surprise for you, Michael."

"Oh?"

"Two tickets to a concert."

And in his naivete he had assumed she meant for Frank Sinatra, Count Basie, maybe Dionne Warwick. But not six guys who dressed in skeleton suits. Each looked like a dead man and made him wish he were. Weren't acts like that reserved for his old stomping ground, New Orleans, and the madness of Mardi Gras?

"What do they call this act?" he screamed during the applause between numbers.

"Death."

"Logical, but does that refer to their name or the music they play?"

She frowned.

"I'd ask you how you managed to get tickets, but I don't see how they could be much in demand."

"Jay Feldman, the local promoter. Not bad, huh? Third row."

Thinking the parking lot would have been close enough, the redhead said, "Why'd he give them to you?"

"Hoping I'd go out with him, I guess."

"And this is your punishment for refusing him?"

"Oh, Michael," she said, slapping his shoulder playfully.

"Right on, lady," said the guy to her right who was wearing a sweat-shirt with a skull and crossbones on it and the words DEATH'S FINAL TOUR. "That sucker giving you any trouble?" He leaned forward and snapped a quick glance at the glowering redhead. "Guess not."

Colored searchlights played across the audience, illuminating the night-time air and blinding the detective. When he wanted to shout, "You'll never take me alive, warden," he knew he had inhaled too much pot. Any minute now he might start referring to that loud noise from the fifty yard line as "music." Pretty soon he'd be clapping his hands, standing on his chair, and yelling "cool" obscenities like the rest of the crowd. Could his debut as a break-dancer be far behind?

Smoke mushroomed from the stage as though a mortar shell had exploded. Rockets whistled overhead, lighting up the humid night. Surely some revelation was at hand. The six skeletons began to writhe. Shayne instantly recalled the time he had been in Haiti to snatch an heiress from a voodoo cult. This sextet had the same zombie-look, the

precise jerky movements of "the undead." In a split second the red-head understood their appeal to kids. Whether it was riding ninety miles per hour on the turnpike, surfing after dark, or shooting up with some new drug, these teenagers wanted to push their new-found freedom, to seek its limits. And of course Death, whether with a capital *D* in a hokey horror film or a loud rock group, was the ultimate limit.

Yeah, this passed for entertainment, no matter how perverted, but he supposed it beat a lot of other things they could have been doing. Then there was the music itself. The ever-present drum, the bass relentlessly stitching together the whole song, the keyboard that flirted with a melody. Still, thirty dollars was a lot to pay for three hours, no matter how it helped them escape the boredom of their education, nowhere jobs, or street prowling.

He glanced at his secretary. Lucy was thoroughly "into" the concert. Detached, unaware of him. She looked younger, and he had the feeling of seeing a new side of her for the first time.

She elbowed him. "The finale."

"I've been looking forward to it," he screamed.

"You'll Be the Death of Me."

"Hey, I know my work's dangerous . . ."

"No, silly. That's the name of the song. It's a real bullet."

"Now that sounds dangerous."

"You've been out on the streets too long. A bullet's what they call a song that climbs rapidly to the top of the charts."

The hit number began with what he swore was static, the kind of thing the Buick's aging radio always picked up—for free. As the song played on, and on, he realized that if he had been hired to track down its tune, he'd have come up empty.

Like six enchanted snakes, the skeletons writhed amidst a battleground of fire and smoke. One of the figures with a guitar donned a huge Death Mask. Slowly he began to circle the other musicians, who gradually withdrew into a huddle in the middle of the stage. Using their instruments they tried to ward off the stalking figure as he drew closer and closer.

Suddenly the Death Mask's guitar lunged forward and touched the bass player. Jagged light arced between them and the latter dropped to the stage.

The audience applauded.

The Death Mask singled out the keyboard player, separating him from the other three. The skeleton with the keyboard cowered in the corner, electrically screaming through his instrument. Then he was silent.

The audience was on its feet. A low cry rolled across the stadium.



"Kill, kill, kill." Deeply base, it appeared to rise from the very bowels of the earth. The crowd on Shayne's side of the field joined in.

The Death Mask bowed to the crowd, acknowledging their desires, and began the hunt anew.

"Kill, kill, kill."

The Death Mask, using his guitar like a scythe, slashed. Another guitar player dropped.

Frenzy gripped the crowd. "Kill, kill, kill," rose up as though all of Miami had joined the chorus.

Shayne found himself in disbelief, but he was even more shocked when he noticed his secretary standing and chanting. He put his hand on her shoulder and pulled her down.

More like a moth than a woman, she stood back up and addressed the light.

Death Mask stalked the drummer, who was trying to keep him at bay with fiery sticks.

"Kill, kill, kill."

Death Mask obliged.

Shayne had not heard a louder yell when the Dolphins won the '73 SuperBowl. He knew now he had been wrong earlier. The crowd were the crazy ones.

One victim remained on stage for Death. He threw down his guitar and tried to escape the raised platform. Death emitted an electronically high-pitched laugh. The victim stood helpless on the edge. Death stabbed. Again, and again. A mad matador finishing off the bull. The redhead half-expected him to cut off the ears.

The crowd erupted into scream. 60,000 people repealed the city's anti-noise ordinance.

Death stood triumphantly at center stage, his scythe-like guitar at his feet. Like a proud athlete he did a victory lap around the stage. Then he slowly reached down for his guitar.

As he picked it up, light flashed and sparks flew. Death staggered. Collapsed. A crescendo of applause broke out and continued, hoping for an encore.

The stage went dark.

The spectators began to look around nervously.

The hairs on the redhead's neck bristled. Something told him the last bit had not been part of the act.

A solitary spotlight came on. Five figures were standing above Death. A man in a white suit came running onto the stage.

"That's Jay I told you about," said Lucy.

The promoter knelt over the fallen figure and whipped off the mask. He leaned close to the immobile face, then picked up his wrist.

A frightened voice came clearly through Death's speaker system. "Eddie's dead, and I'm not kidding. Can you guys hear me? He's really dead."

The crowd exploded into applause.

Shayne felt sick to his stomach.

## II

MIKE SHAYNE UNLOCKED THE DOOR TO HIS FLAGLER Street office for his secretary and followed her in.

"At least that dreadful death at last night's concert is behind us now," she said pensively.

"Yeah," answered the redhead, "but the malady lingers on."

Slamming the red Aigner purse down on her desk, Lucy Hamilton spun around. "Michael, how can you be so callous? I mean, last night somebody died. Doesn't that mean anything to you?"

Shayne unbuttoned his blue sports coat and sat down on the springy couch he had been promising to get reupholstered for years. The smell of fresh paint where they had repaired the office after the recent attempt on his life attacked his nostrils. Would that his soul could be so easily fixed. "Angel, I've seen a lot of men die, and many of them I knew and cared about. That kind on stage was a stranger."

"Oh, now I understand—you only weep for friends." Her sarcasm replaced the usual honeyed drawl. "With a hard shell like yours I doubt you have many friends, so you don't have to do much crying, do you, Mr. Man-of-Steel?"

Well-aware of her recent and obsessive discouragement with his profession, the big detective tried to calm her down. "Deep down it bothers me, yes. But I guess over the years because of my line of work I've had to build a little wall around my emotions to protect them. Maybe I do quip too much or seem to take things too lightly, but it's the only way I . . ."

"Little wall! It's more like a fortress, Michael." She sat down and mechanically flipped on the Apple IIe. Then, as if changing her mind, she reached into her top drawer, pulled out a colorful brochure, and tossed it at the redhead.

"What's this?" he said, making the catch.

"It's about this tennis ranch in Arizona. La Placido—the place of peace. Deserts, horseback riding, swimming pool, cozy little cabins. I've been thinking lately . . ."

"Is this another of your schemes to get me to take a vacation?"

"What if it is? Even Superman has his Fortress of Solitude."

"I appreciate the comparison, but a little flattery . . ."

"Damn it, Michael, this is for your own good." She jerked herself



upright and went to the window. "You've been overworked lately. You've had two attempts on your life. You've taken on more cases than you can possibly handle. You won't consider even a part-time assistant. Don't you see you can't keep going this way. To be is to live, not just to survive."

Shayne rasped his left thumbnail against a recently-shaven face that was already starting to bristle. "It's how I've always done business, Angel. People come to me, not some help I've hired. And if a client calls, how can I turn down somebody who needs me? Would a doctor slam his door on an injured man? Would a priest lock the confessional on a troubled woman?"

"Stop it with the analogies, Socrates." She sat down with an audible sigh. "How about we make a deal." Her slender finger pointed at the old clock on the wall with its new bulletholes. "It's 8:36 at the moment. After testifying in the O'Brien case yesterday, your docket is momentarily clear. If nobody comes in before, say, 10:00 with some heart-rending tale of woe, just you and I pack our bags for Arizona?"

"11:00."

"10:00 and I'll even accept a phone call from a blonde in distress."

Shayne backpedaled into his office and deposited his sports coat on the rack next to the door. "Deal," he called back.

By 9:00 his secretary was humming "V-A-C-A-T-I-O-N." By 9:30 she was singing "By the Time I Get to Phoenix." At 9:55 she paused in the doorway between their offices to hit an imaginary backhand at him.

AT 9:57 THE MAIN OFFICE DOOR CREAKED OPEN. LUCY, who had been modeling a pretend bikini and making the redhead see the brighter aspects of some time off, whirled around. "Jay," she uttered to a thin man in white pants and a flowered shirt unbuttoned down to his navel. "Whew! For a minute I thought you were a client. Mike and I really appreciated those tickets you gave me for last night."

A short black man in a dark suit, purple shirt, and black tie followed the promoter through the door. Light gleamed off the diamond that had been inset in his right front tooth.

"Sorry to disappoint you, Luce honey," said Feldman.

"Luce honey?" said the redhead as he looked up.

"Your boss in?" said the promoter.

Lucy shut the door between the outer office and the detective's inner sanctum. "Listen, Jay," she said, holding up her fingers about an inch apart, "I'm about this far from a vacation I need and deserve, and nobody—especially you—is going to spoil it for me. Now get out!"

The promoter shook his head. "I'm sorry about this, Angel-face, but . . ."

"Please," she said, advancing toward him, "I don't want Michael to know."

"What don't you want me to know?" The rangey redhead was standing in his doorway.

"Nothing!" And his secretary uttered a very unlady-like word that shocked Shayne more than the two guests.

The promoter began to pump the detective's hand. "Mike, sweetheart . . ."

"The last male to call me that," said Shayne, "is learning to walk with a cane."

"Right, Mike," said Feldman. "Showbiz talk, you know. It's as much a part of me as that tough-guy speak is for you. Capiche?"

Lucy said, "Jay, Michael doesn't talk tough—he *is* tough."

"I hear where you're coming from, lady," said Feldman. "Great little sec you've got here, Mike. Now don't hold it against me I tried to steal her, but I guess big bucks aren't her thing."

Shayne noted the discrepancy between his and her version of the promoter's advances.

"Mike," said Feldman, "and thanks for letting me call you that." He took the black man by the arm and pulled him forward. "This is Gabriel Horne. You probably remember him from the 60's. Gabe and the Detroit Brass. Scored a couple of gold records. One album went platinum."

Horne shook his head. "Actually, I think we were the only Motown group that never went anywhere. Smokey, Diana, The Jacksons—household names. I decided to get out of performing in '72."

"Yeah, right, Gabe," said the thin promoter, his smile gleaming almost as much as the diamond in Horne's mouth. "Guy's too modest for his own good. I mean, if you can't promote yourself, who can you promote?"

Shayne fired up a Camel. "Before you try to sell me a little plot of land just south of the Everglades, what can I do for you?"

"Ruin my vacation," interjected Lucy.

"My cards are on the table," said Feldman. "You're a detective. Gabe wanted to see the best Eye That Never Sleeps we got in this town. I told him he was over-reacting, but he insisted, so it couldn't be anybody but you, Mike sweetheart."

Shayne glared at him.

"I understand you saw my boys last night," said Horne to the detective.

"You manage that loud funeral procession," deducted the redhead.

"Mike, Mike, Mike," said Feldman, "the name of the game is entertainment. It may have been A-O-K for Sinatra and Crosby to stand

there and croon a few mean tunes, but we're talking a different generation. It's spelled MTV, vi-de-o. Kids want hype, excitement to tear them away from the humdrum world of mom, pop, and the American Dream. Hey, I'm not one to knock the nuclear family—had one once myself—but I want you to know where I'm coming from."

"Where's that?"

Horne said, "Maybe I'd better . . ."

"Nonsense," said an exasperated Feldman. "I'm on a roll. Let me set the mood for your presentation." He lit a long stogie that looked and smelt like a licorice stick. "Mike, the names John Lennon, Marvin Gaye, and Sam Cooke mean anything to you?"

"Singers," said the redhead, inhaling the Camel deeply in self-defense.

"Not bad," said the promoter. "You'd be dy-no-mite in Trivial Pursuit. Let me lay a few more on you. Elvis, Dennis Wilson of the Beach Boys, Buddy Holly. Stop me if you catch on."

"They're all dead," said Lucy.

"Give the little lady a prize, as we used to say in my old days with the carnies," said Feldman. "Hey, if there's a rock-and-roll heaven, you know they've got a helluva band. Righteous Brothers said that. Anyway, the Graveyard Gig goes on and on. Mama Cass, bless her soul. Brian Jones, late of the Stones. Jim Morrison of the immortal Doors. Oh, light my fire. For an industry where all the violence takes place on the stage, and at contract time—a little joke, guys—we've had more than our share of sets with the Grim Reaper."

"Enough," said Horne. He pushed the promoter backwards into the couch. "Death is a local band. Bunch of guys I found hanging around various Beach joints. Occasional sidemen waiting for a gig. Now they're hot, and the sky's the limit for those six."

"Five," said Shayne.

"A lesser group," continued the manager, "would give up after last night."

"A real tragedy, a real tragedy," chorused Feldman as though he were a backup singer for Horne.

The manager pressed on. "The boys took a vote last night after the doc gave 'em the word Eddie had bought it."

"Eddie?" said Shayne.

"Eddie Kelly, lead vocalist. Had a better voice *Rolling Stone* claims than the lead singer of Air Supply, whatever his name is."

"Russell Hitchcock," said Feldman. "Caught him at the Garden . . ."

"Shut up," snapped Horne, spinning and waving his fist. Feldman sank even deeper into the broken couch.

If a spring comes, can a fall be far behind, thought Shayne. "I'll try one more time," he said. "Why did you come here?"

Horne answered abruptly. "I have proof that last night Eddie was murdered, and I want you to find his killer."

### III

THE BIG DETECTIVE RECALLED THE PREVIOUS EVENING'S concert. "From where we sat, it looked like Kelly was electrocuted."

"He was," said Horne.

"Fried to a crisp," commented Feldman. "When I bent over him last night, he smelled like a finger-licking drumstick that the Colonel had rejected as overdone."

"Jay," protested Lucy.

The promoter said, "Just telling it like it is, babe."

"With all that high-powered equipment around," said the redhead, "isn't the electricity a constant problem?"

"Yes," admitted the diamond-toothed manager. "The fire marshall's always hassling us."

"Till a few Franklins get him to look the other way," said Feldman. "What does the sucker expect us to do? We got miles a cable and enough amps to light a small town. Hey, this isn't the Hillbilly Brothers play the county fair. Our audiences demand something different each and every show."

"Like a death," said Shayne.

For the first time Feldman was speechless.

"Anytime you perform," said the manager, "there's a certain amount of danger. We got a road crew of a dozen and enough equipment to fill two semis."

"A road crew?" said the detective. Then he recalled the sweatshirt he had seen the night before. "Why is this being billed as Death's Final Tour?"

It was the manager's turn to be silent.

"Gabe's boys have been together for a couple of years now," said Feldman with less animation. "They've got fame and money, and now some of them want to be just plain John, Paul, George and Ringo, not the Beatles. Do their own things. Personally, I think they're wacko with all that bread on the table. Even sliced six ways, they sure don't go hungry, if you know what I mean, but then nobody ever said rock stars were playing with all 88 keys."

"So this tour is one last chance to harvest the teenagers' allowances," concluded Shayne.

"Hey, Mike sweetheart," said the promoter, "we get the mom-and-pop crowd too. Somebody's got to bring the teenyboppers out after

dark. We got t-shirts, buttons, programs, and we take a percentage of all concessions. Then there's the rights for the TV doc. Did I take a few conferences with the webs on that one." His eyes almost rolled back in his head like a mystic who had seen the promised land and it was green—the color of money. "Can't forget the Death Lottery. They send in their cash, and we draw names at random to see who get to buy our ducats at \$30 a pop. In the four months in between we bank all that money. Hey, do you know what the rate of return on a high-risk mutual is?"

Oh, what Dick Clark had wrought, thought the redhead. From penny-ante dates at roadhouses and high school auditoriums to a billion-dollar business. Well, if you want to dance, you have to pay the piper. The problem was that it was kids who were paying—through the nose. "You mentioned a doc earlier. Did he examine Kelly?"

"Yes," said the manager.

Feldman added, "Didn't look at him as long as I did and said the same thing followed by 'The bill'll be in the morning mail.' Can you believe that? If the Good Samaritan were alive today, he'd probably take both VISA and MASTERCARD."

Shayne stubbed out the Camel in his seashell tray. "You still haven't told me what makes you think that Kelly's death wasn't anything more than a short, some wires getting accidentally crossed."

"How about this." The black man reached into his dark suit coat and withdrew a piece of paper.

The redhead took it. In various sized letters and words cut from magazines, someone had put together a warning: DEATH BE NOT PROUD, FOR DEATH THOU SHALT DIE—ONE AT A TIME. "Did you show this to the police?"

"The local Keystone Kops," said Feldman. "Do you know how much dough they wanted to moonlight at last night's show? We had to hire some rent-a-badges. Whatever happened to public service?"

Shayne pressed. "You showed this note to the police and they didn't do anything? That doesn't sound like Will Gentry's boys."

"First," said the promoter, "we like to never get them down to the Bowl. Second, most of them were more concerned with getting autographs and eyeballing the ladies. Sure, they said they'd look into it, but you know how that old song goes. Cops think of all entertainers as spoiled dopers who get that they deserve."

The manager said, "Look, Shayne, we've got to admit that these kinds of threats are not unusual."

The redhead arched an eyebrow. "You've been threatened before?"

"What performer isn't?" said Feldman. It's become a national pastime. Little people get off on scaring big people. Look at the threats

Michael Jackson received on his recent Victory Tour."

"Specifically, what kind of threats did you get?" said the detective.

"You know—"Don't play Dallas! Lee Harvey isn't the only one with a rifle," said the manager.

"99% of them are harmless," said the promoter with the assurance of a pollster.

Shayne turned to Horne. "What makes you think this one isn't?"

The manager was succinct. "This note didn't come in the mail. It was found on Kelly's body."

Lucy said, "What actually caused the death last night?"

"His ax cord was frayed," said the manager, "and fell across the wire leading to the laser."

"Well, Mike sweetheart," said Feldman, peeling off some bills from a wad, "what's it gonna take to put you in our corner?"

"Michael was just going to take a vacation when you showed up," said Lucy, "but we'd be glad to give you the name of another reputable agency."

Shayne stared across the room at his secretary. "Tell you what, guys, I'll look into this for a while, see what I can find. Lucy, draw up a standard contract with a helluva retainer."

"Love ya, Mike, for it," said Feldman, "and we'll negotiate on the retainer stuff."

The manager handed Shayne a card. "My boys'll be up by noon and trying to cut the rest of their new album over there. I'd appreciate it if you would stop in."

"Sure," said the redhead, still eyeing his secretary. "We can't just weep for friends. Lucy, weren't you telling me a few minutes ago that we have a responsibility to our fellow man?"

"Heavy," said Feldman. "Definitely heavy."

"Oh," said the brunette, her eyes fixed on her employer, "when I draw up the contract, how are you going to sign it? Mike Shayne, Humanitarian?"

"If he solves this one," said the promoter, "I'll personally recommend him for the Noble Prize."

#### IV

SHAYNE WHEELED THE BUICK INTO THE FENCED-IN LOT reserved for Zanadoo Records employees. Through the wavy heat from the tarmac, the building's pointed towers and parapets seemed to shimmer like a drug vision of the Taj Mahal.

A blast of cold air assaulted him as he opened the door.

"Can I help you?"



The speaker was a gum-chewing blonde in a rhinestone-studded t-shirt that looked as though it had been tie-dyed in the 60's and not washed since then either. He'd have made book that she was both a receptionist and a singer "just between gigs."

"I want to talk with Death."

"Who doesn't?" she said, popping her gum in rhythm to a pounding drumbeat filtering through a hidden speaker.

"I have a noon appointment. I'm Mike Shayne."

She shuffled through a pile of jumbled papers that the redhead was sure was an accurate portrayal of her mind.

Between bubbles, she announced, "I seem to remember your name."

"Good for you."

"I just can't find it anywhere," she admitted after a while. "Why don't you go on down the hall to Studio C. That's right after B, you know."

"Glad to hear they haven't rearranged the alphabet," said the detective, entering the corridor. What, he wondered, would Will Rogers have said if he had lived long enough to encounter the rock crowd?

A red light glowed over the entranceway to Studio C. Shayne went in slowly. Loud music abruptly slowed to silence as though the batteries producing it had gone dead.

"Hey, creep," said a female voice to his right, "don't you know what a red light means?"

Taking a quick look at her mesh top, mini skirt, and her platinum-dyed hair, he resisted the temptation to tell her.

She put down a thick book she had been reading and continued, "It means 'Stay Out.' The greatest group in America is creating a little magic in here, and you just pulled the plug."

"Doesn't matter, Ange," called a blond kid with a headset.

Shayne noticed he was dressed like a bad imitation of Buster Crabbe in a Saturday morning serial. Black-leather wrist bands, shiney breast-plate, and a microphone in his holster.

"The Duck hasn't hit a clear note the whole number," continued the kid.

"Speaking of numbers," said a tall kid in a green t-shirt and brown Afro, "why don't you take two." He forked two fingers and tried to poke the other's eyes out in an old comic routine.

"Cut it, Duck," said another in a cut-off football jersey with 69 on it and a gold earring in his left lobe. "We're sick to death of your stupid Three Stooges' shticks."

From out of a glass-paneled control room stepped Gabriel Horne.

Despite the abundant air conditioning, sweat poured from his receding hairline. "Cool it, you guys. This is the detective I told you about, Mike Shayne."

"Any relation to Mike Hammer?" said a black guy sitting in front of a keyboard.

"If he is," drawled a kid with long blond hair and the flag of Dixie on his guitar, "I want some of those broads always hanging around him."

"Guys," said the manager, "is that any way to treat somebody who's looking into Eddie's murder?"

"Book him, Dano," said the Afroed kid called Duck.

"Murder One," said the drummer, accentuating his point with a thump of his bass drum.

The bass player hit a few licks of the *Dragnet* theme. "I know, man. You want the facts, just the facts."

One dead, decided Shayne, and five OD'ed on TV reruns.

"Suppose I make some introductions," said the imitation Buster Crabbe.

The drummer said, "Johnny, why don't you make like Dick Clark in the control room while we play back that last tape of the instrumentals."

"Good idea," said Horne. "Johnny's not needed for that because with Eddie gone he's the only lead vocalist left."

"Yeah, Johnny," said the black keyboardist, "you go rest those golden vocal cords."

AMIDST A SUDDEN THUNDERSTORM OF OBSCENITIES, Horne led Shayne and the blonde kid into a control room that was even colder than the studio. Two men were sitting before a lit-up panel that looked to the redhead like something out of a science fiction movie.

"Everything's recorded on separate tracks," explained Horne. "Despite what my guys think, their careers are made by the decisions we make in here. What to overdub, what to . . ."

"Gabe, shut up," said the kid. He turned to the redhead. "My name's Johnny Gordon."

"But," said the redhead, looking at his outfit again, "everybody calls you Flash."

"Hey, you're O.K. Gabe, you done good."

"Praise from Caesar," said the black man.

The detective took over. "Your manager thinks Eddie was murdered. What do you think?"

"Could be. Maybe yes, maybe no."

"Let's suppose he was," said the detective. "Who could have been in a position last night to do him in?"

"I used to play CLUE. Motives and means, but you're talking opportunity." The kid began to count on his fingers.

Shayne hoped he didn't have to take off his shoes—or worse.

"Maybe seven people," said the kid.

"Who?"

"The five of us plus Gabe and that screwy promoter."

"Jay Feldman."

"Yeah, him. We were the only ones close enough to where the wires crossed."

"What about your road crew?"

"They were under the stands getting high on the cheapest stuff they could find."

Shayne glanced through the glass where the five members sat keeping time to unheard music. The drummer was fondling the girl he had encountered guarding the gate, but she didn't seem to mind. The detective took out a notepad. Gone were the days when he trusted everything to memory. "Tell me about them."

"You got a light?" said the blond kid.

Shayne shook out a Camel.

"It'll have to do," he said, lighting up. "We're all local kids, more or less. Shelby White, he's the black keyboardist, is our lovable manager's find. Next thing Gabe'll want to change our name to Salt and Pepper or The Oreos."

"Hey," said Horne. "I told you to cut out talking that racial trash."

"Got it, Gabe," said Gordon. "Anyway, the Shellfish wacks some mean keys. Used to be a high school English teacher in the Big Apple, but with that baby face of his he couldn't get no respect. Doctor Dangerfield."

"Who's the bass player you were arguing with?" inquired the investigator.

"Mike Burduck, but everybody calls him Duck. Came to us from a pits band called Dressed to Kill. That was back in New York too. He wandered South seeking his fame and fortune. Spends all his free time watching videotapes of classic movie comedies. Guess that's why he's the practical joker in the group."

"What kind of jokes?"

"You know. Whoopie cushions in the sack, buckets of water over the door. Just the other night Robbins almost killed him for one of his jokes?"

"What happened?"

"The Duck put some kind of soap in Robbins' hairdryer. It kept foaming out over his hair, and Dixie took offense when the dryer shorted."

"Dixie?" said Shayne. "Robbins?"

"Elvin Robbins, lead guitar. We call him Dixie cause he's such a red-neck. I mean, this guy has hordes of worthless Confederate money. He really thinks the South will rise again. I'll bet you real money taped inside his guitar is a picture of Robert E. Lee. Psycho."

Shayne sized up the situation. "How does he get along with White?"

"In a word, they hate each other. If Dixie calls him 'Boy' again, we're gonna be a quartet."

"Minus a manager," said Horne.

"Yeah, right, Gabe," said the lead singer. "Gabe's always making these threats. Tries to keep us in line. Guess it comes from his background of failure."

"That leaves your drummer," said the redhead.

"Rick Steppe. Really quiet. Marches to the beat of a different drummer, to coin a phrase. Rich kid. Parents got lots of money, but Rick didn't want to Steppe into the family shoe business. You've seen the shops all over the city. He's fine as long as we leave him alone."

Shayne noticed the drummer was having a minor fit on the drums. The girl who had been on his lap was now getting a play from Burdick, who had laid down his bass with other designs. "Who's she?"

"Ange."

"A groupie," said Horne. "A pass-around."

"Eddie called her Six-pack because . . ."

"I think I can figure that one out," said the big detective. "You left out someone else."

"Who?"

"You."

Horne bit off the end of a cigar. "Johnny, as you can tell from his sugar-and-water hair, can't make up his mind whether he wants to be a punk rocker or just a bad one."

"That's *bad* as in baaaaaad," said Gordon. "This group has always lacked direction. Six kids going in six ways. When we finish our four gigs at the Bowl and then the eight weeks on the road, I'm betting the guys'll change their mind and want to stay together—with me as their leader. I'm the genius—I'm the glue. Tell him, Gabe, whose idea was the skeletons? Who choreographed our famous death dance finals? Who . . . ?"

"You, Flash. Kid Wonderful," said the manager, spitting out the cigar butt end.

"Don't get smug with me, man. I'll bet you didn't tell the P.I. here how much you hated the late, not-so-great Eddie Kelly."

"Oh?" said Shayne. "Why?"

"This Final Tour stuff. It was Eddie's scheme. Afterwards, he wanted to settle down with some broad he didn't talk much about. Get out of the biz."

"I've been that road," said Horne defensively. "I just didn't want him to make the same mistake I did. That's all."

"Last night," said Gordon, taking a deep drag, "just before we went on stage, we had to pull Eddie off Darkmeat over there."

Horne lunged for the lead singer. Shayne stepped quickly between them. "Easy," he said. "Let me find the killer before I've got another body to worry about."

WHEN HE WALKED INTO THE CITY ROOM OF THE *MIAMI Daily News*, Shayne felt like he had just discovered the lost graveyard of styrofoam cups. If there were ever an American boycott of coffee, the country was certainly going to lose the freedom of the press.

Rourke looked up from his computer terminal. "Shamus. Are you here today to see me or my all-knowing, all-seeing crystal VDT?"

"I'll give you two guesses, Tim."

"While I'm trying to decide, you want some coffee?"

"No thanks. I had the Buick's oil changed yesterday."

"With this deluge of flattery I'm sure you want something."

"Death."

In mid-swig the scarecrow reporter almost choked. "I guess I've always thought it the other way around. The Grim Reaper does the looking."

"What do you know about rock music?" said the detective as he slid over a vacant chair.

"Plenty. That's the kind of stuff played during the Stone Age."

The redhead had a suspicion that the *Daily News*' crack reporter was going to K in this ballpark. "I guess I should have asked the VDT."

"I'll do you one better." He glanced at his watch. "It's almost 2:00. She should be in by now."

"Who?"

"Rourke's revenge for all the freebies you've gotten from me over the years." He dialed a number and said a few words. "Just like back in high school. You're all set up with Kiki."

"Kiki?"

"Kiki will meet you across the street at the Tin Ear in a few minutes for drinks and some whatever."

"Tim!" Shayne stood up, wondering what he'd gotten himself into.  
"O.K. How will I know her."

"Trust me. You'll know her."

"A perfect stranger?"

"Trust me. You'll know her."

"Thanks," said the redhead, putting the chair back. "There is one thing before I go."

"You've reconsidered about the coffee?"

"No."

"What is it, Columbo?"

"Zanadoo Records. When you get a few minutes, see if you can find out who owns it?"

As the big detective walked out, he glanced back at the gaunter-than-usual reporter. If Rourke ever wanted to moonlight, he could play side-man with Death without a costume.

FROM THE MOMENT HE STEPPED INSIDE, SHAYNE REALIZED why the Tin Ear was such a popular escape for Miami's downtown yuppies. Once you walked through the bar doors, the blaring music made thinking impossible. For a generation weaned on rock concerts, perhaps such a mindless place was inevitable.

Rourke was right. Kiki was easy to spot. She was standing at the bar, her right foot tapping the brass rail and her hands auditioning on the formica for the rock scene's next open keyboard. Her long, red hair swept upward as through a fan concealed in her cranium were turned on full blast. A black-leather racing jacket was a billboard for Porsche while her skin-tight leather pants were encircled by so many colorful bandanas she must have been hawking them in her spare time.

"Kiki," he said confidently.

"You got her, red. Great opening line. No one uses names nowadays. I heard it through the grapevine," she said lyrically as though she were about ready to break into song, "you wanted to rap. What are you drinking?"

Shayne looked at the list on the wall. Everything was exotic. Crosby Cocktails—one gulp and Bing—Bananerama Punch, Billy Joel Juice, Tom and Judy Collins, Jack and Charlie Daniels, Lime Rickey Skaggs, Mai Tai One On, a Tom and Jerry Reed. Feeling disreputable, he called, "A beer."

The sequined-suited bartender, who was either gyrating to the loud music or having some sort of fit, didn't respond. The detective didn't know whether to give the record an 85 or to check to see if the bartender had swallowed his tongue.



"Hey, Ralphie," Kiki shouted, "the dude needs a brew."

The tall figure stopped abruptly. "A beer? Nobody who comes in here orders a plain, ordinary beer." He slid off his shades. "Hold on. I think we might have a couple of cans of Billy Beer in the back room."

"No thanks," said the big detective. "I'm a Republican."

The redhaired woman emitted a shrill blast that was either a high-pitched laugh or a hurricane siren. "Not bad, Straight Arrow. Why don't you have a little spring water with me and tell little Kiki what you need."

She picked up a pitcher and two glasses, then led him to a barrel that functioned as a table. Pulling out a chair and shimmying into it, she looked Shayne in the face. "Music is love, and love is music, if you know what I mean."

He didn't have the slightest, but he pushed on. "What can you tell me about Death?"

"You talking about the group or morbid rock?"

"The group."

She aspirated, "H-O-T."

He could feel the blast of warm breath across the table. "I don't need a weather report. I just want to know something about them."

She tittered an octave lower. "You ever thought about a career in radio? You'd make a great call-in host if you weren't so serious." Sipping her drink, she said, "Death is a mega-group on the verge of going nova like the Stones and Beach Boys. I mean HOT! I hope Eddie Kelly's death last night doesn't hurt their rise to another plane of existence."

"Who would want to do him in?"

"Oh, about 50,000 parents, I'd guess." She looked at the redhead through one green eye and one blue. "I thought it was an accident though. I was standing not twenty feet away when it happened. Are you sure Eddie was wasted on the way?"

"It's a possibility I'm looking into."

"So that's why the great Mike Shayne, Miami's top-of-the-charts tec, has come to rap with insignificant *moi*?"

"Tim seems to think you can fill me in on some details about those guys."

"I tell you humbly if Kiki Burke, Music Journalist, doesn't know it, it isn't worth knowing."

Noting what rock critics were calling themselves these days, Shayne said, "Who would want to do in Eddie Kelly?"

"Great refrain," she said. "Let me give you some lyrics to wrap around it. First of all, I gotta tell you those guys live in the fast lane."

The Osmonds they ain't. They've been banned by every major hotel chain in America for trashing their rooms in their now-famous coke-snorting, get-down-and-boogie, lose-your-inhibitions, who-needs-a-wake-up-call parties."

"Somehow, I'd hate to put Conrad Hilton at the top of my suspect list."

"Good point, but I just wanted you to know up front you're not dealing with angles when you get involved with Death. Considering all the women those six—excuse me, five—have had. They go through their chicks like the Pres through jelly beans."

"So you're saying the Boyfriends of America should top my list."

"Along with Eddie's parents."

"Why?"

"Eddie didn't have your normal street background. He was born with a silver sax in his hands. Real uptown boy. Came from a Beachcrat family so well-heeled the father's first name is an initial. Poppa Kelly wanted Eddie in the business—Momma wanted him to attend the Juilliard School of Music. I understand they vowed to do anything to keep the scion from the evils of, horrors, rock and roll."

"Any others?"

"I hope you've got plenty of time." She motioned to Ralph for more water. "Then there's always good ole Gabriel 'Toot Your Own' Horne."

"Why would he want to kill one of the six geese? Seems to me he'd be out a golden egg or two."

"*Non, non, mon chou*. I don't mean Gabe would send Eddie to the big Woodstock in the sky. His connections might."

"Connections?"

"To get Death started, he needed a bankroll. Now no gray-suit is going to invest in a rock group that might become the next Rolling Stones, but probably the Innocent Pudding."

"Who's that?"

"My point. Anyway, Gabe may have gotten the bread from that well-known bakery spelled M-O-B. In your business you're probably well aware that if you don't make your mortgage payments to those guys, you get more than a computer-printed warning from their collection agency."

"I thought you said Death was doing well."

"Look, Shaynie-poo, in this business you can be doing super and going broke at the same time. Sure, Death takes in a lot of black ink, but they have too many red-ink habits."

"Drugs?"

"That only one of many. Take their quick-talking promoter, Jay Feldman."

"I'd rather not."

"Oh, you've met Stereo-mouth?"

"Yeah."

"I don't know which is bigger—his mouth or his gambling habit. The guy started out as an investment counselor for the group, and before anybody knew it, he was their front man, taking a huge cut, much to Horne's dismay, off the top. Come to think of it, Eddie did have that business background. He was the only one in the group with enough sense to read their monthly statements."

"And figure out that something wasn't kosher," concluded the detective. "Not bad. Anybody else?"

"Any member of the group. When Gabe pulled that school of sharks together, he could never have dreamed how they'd be at each other's throats. Flash was hungry like the wolf. Wanted Eddie's role as lead singer. Flash used to head up a street gang called the Cruisers when Gabe talked him into coming on board with the group and has always thought he should be numero uno with Death. But everybody knew Eddie had the voice the public wanted. Remember David Clayton Thomas of Blood, Sweat, and Tears and what happened to the First Edition when Kenny Rogers pulled out?"

"Go on."

"You got the Shellfish and the Duck from New York who didn't take to a Miami boy getting all the publicity. And Rick Steppe, Mr. Cloud Dancer. He was always missing rehearsals and even gigs because of his habit. Eddie stayed on his case to go drug rehab. Then there's Elvin Robbins. Good ole son of the South, that redneck country boy hated Eddie. Never liked the city boy background. Went absolutely berserk every time they played 'Dixie' and Eddie refused to stand."

"You seem to be saying that anybody wanting to do in Eddie had to take a number."

"Right on."

Shayne picked up the check. "Thanks a lot."

"Wait a minute," she said. "Let me ask you a question. Do you think this outfit"—she fingered the black leather—"is too much of a downer for Eddie's funeral tomorrow?"

"Well," said the detective ironically, "you could use a few more bandanas."

As he left, the up-tempo muzak came to a pause and he heard her mumbling about "a few gold bracelets, a silver headband maybe . . ."

A LITTLE SOUTH AND A LITTLE UPSCALE FROM WILL Gentry's home, the Kelly estate lay in Bal Harbour. Shayne didn't expect less. It was 4:30 and he found himself in the shadows cast by the two-story hacienda.

The butler claimed Mrs. Kelly was "indisposed," but when the detective sent back word why he had come, she agreed to see him in the solarium. While he waited alone, he spotted some exotic roses, a few orchids, and some common flowers he didn't know the names of. It was the kind of hothouse atmosphere where anything could grow. What about kids, he wondered.

She didn't appear—she made an entrance. A quick glance at the up-swept blonde hair, the heavy makeup, the red lounging gown that showed a bit too much cleavage, and the pouting pose in the doorway as if holding for effect convinced the redhead she had been an actress and probably still fancied herself one.

"How good of you to come, Mr. Shayne," she said, holding out a limp hand for him to shake or caress.

He shook. "It's nice of you to see me at a time like this."

She led him over to a wicker grouping and rang a bell. "The time like this was three years ago. That's when our son died."

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

"When Eddie dropped out of the Wharton School of Business to take a fling with that dreadful music. I haven't spoken to him since. Does that sound rather harsh?"

The investigator felt like he had been granted an audience. It was the kind of question a counselor should answer. "A bit."

"It doesn't matter. Eddie, Jr. was such a disappointment to me." She looked away into a private vision. "When he was five, he could already play the piano. A prodigy, his teacher said. I just knew he was going to finish the career I never did."

"You were a musician?"

"More or less. I did musical comedy. In 1961 I understudied Julie Andrews in *Camelot*. Then there were Liza, Barbra . . ."

The butler brought her back to the present by placing a silver pitcher with a set of silver-rimmed glasses between them. She poured two drinks and plunked an olive in each.

"I hope you like your martinis very dry, Mr. Shayne. We do." She raised her glass to a black orchid. "To potential. May its curse some day end."

The detective sipped more out of courtesy than thirst—and was glad he did. "Very dry" was an understatement. The familiar sense of *deja vu* flooded over him as the cool liquid warmed his chest. He found him-

self once again not so much investigating a case, but a person, and he had already developed a real sense of a perfect stranger named Eddie Kelly.

"Of course it wasn't the music that ultimately did him in," Mrs. Kelly said as though cued by some unseen prompter.

"What was it?"

"He was seduced by a lifestyle, a libertine one. In the end it happens to us all. In another year, maybe a month on Broadway I'd have gotten that break I needed, but up-and-coming Mr. Kelly happened along, and I chose to live comfortably in Miami rather than in the squalor of the Village. What did you want to be when you were a child, Mr. Shayne?"

"It depended on what day it was."

"An unobsessed man. How rare." She refilled her glass. "Now, Eddie, Jr. was definitely obsessed."

"With music."

"Heavens no. By a cheap tart whose only ambition was to replace me in this house."

"Who is this . . ."

"Whore? Maybe tramp is the word you seek. What did he call that piece of female trash? Angel? No. Angie. The g is hard as in groupie. From what I've read in the scandal sheets, though, her attraction to him had the staying power of yesterday's newspaper."

Shayne looked over the rim of his glass. The olive was starting to sink. "I was told that just recently Eddie had a change of heart about his music career."

"Hallelujah!" said a voice from behind the detective. "But don't you think it would be crass of me to posthumously change the sign on my office and its six branches to KELLY & SON, INVESTMENTS."

"Hello, Edward," she said. "Home is the hero, home from the big board."

He poured himself a drink, deliberated over the olive, then said, "Hello, Teresa."

Shayne couldn't help but notice their exchanges. They had the kind of warmth that would keep their drinks chilled long past the happy hour.

"Well, I hate to break up this party, dear," said her husband, "but Commodore and Lady Postwaite are expecting us at six bells or whatever."

"I'm sure Mr. Shayne is impressed by how well we're bearing up under the strain." Her words were starting to slur.

"What, may I ask," said the investment counselor as though it were an afterthought, "was my son going to do with his career? Join George

Steppe's son in selling plastic shoes with goldfish in the heels to equally outlandish people?"

"Actually he was going to get married."

The blonde paused in mid-pour. "To whom? Not that tramp."

"I don't know," admitted the detective.

"A week ago at the Whitehead's costume ball," said her husband as he drained the pitcher of its last drop, "a profoundly inebriated George Steppe made me an offer I shouldn't have refused."

Shayne said, "What was that?"

"We each kick in ten grand to hire a hood to take out the other's son."

"My God," said his wife, "what did you do?"

"I agreed."

"But George'll say and do anything with a few drinks under his belt. I hope you told him later you were joking."

The investment broker wiped his lips with a monogrammed handkerchief. "I wasn't."

## VII

NOT THAT HE WANTED TO, BUT THE BIG DETECTIVE HAD decided it was time to talk to the individual members of Death. How strange it had been to discover that the bond that held the band together was not love, but hate. The invitation provided the perfect opportunity to check out what he had been told.

It was dark as he pulled up in the circular drive of the Miami Beach home. As he got out of the Buick, he realized the whole house was what his friends on the street called a ghetto-blast. Almost synchronized with the music that emanated from the mansion, light pulsed through the open windows. Over the fleet of expensive limos and sports cars drifted the sweet scent of pot. If it weren't so isolated, the estate would have been the obvious target of a police bust.

He knocked. Nobody answered.

He walked through the unlocked door. An intertwined couple, unable to make it to the bedroom, served as a novel welcome mat as they writhed in the hallway on a Persian rug. Not having a bucket of cold water, he stepped over their magic carpet ride and into the living room.

Somebody had left two stereo speakers together overnight, and they had multiplied. A group of people were down on their hands and knees like kids playing with a choo-choo train, but the only tracks they were interested in were long and white and made of a popular powder. Their



tooting was done with the aid of rolled-up bills.

A dining room table was stacked with booze, cold cuts, cheese, and a cigar box of rolled-up joints. Kiki hadn't done Death's parties justice, or was this the rock scene's version of a wake?

Couples were dancing in what had once been a library. The men still had on vests, ties, and other remnants of the nine-to-five world. The girls wore the uniforms of punk rockers—parachute pants, torn sweatshirts, dyed hair, and glitter, lots of glitter. All had vacant eyes as though checked at the door. Tomorrow they'd be asking, "Did I have a good time?" But who'd be able to remember enough to tell them?

By the time he had covered the first floor he felt like a ghost. Activity was everywhere, but nobody knew he was there. Another feeling crept up on him. Something was wrong—not just illegal, but wrong.

He stood in the doorway of the library, his steel-gray eyes checking out the female bodies. They weren't the usual mix of teenyboppers—some tall, some short, some skinny, some fat—found screaming at the concerts. These were women, more Hollywood's version of what extras in a party scene looked like. Their figures were too mature, too well-developed. Their makeup perfect. Even their clothes coordinated. Punk Chic!

"See anything you like, Sergeant Friday?" came a voice.

Shayne focused on the leather couch where the Afroed Duck sat stroking a woman's leg as though it were his bass guitar. "Eddie's death really got to you?" said the detective.

"Hey," said the bass player in a Groucho Marx voice and an arched eyebrow, "Eddie was a fun-loving guy. He'd have wanted us to remember him this way. No long faces."

Shayne lit up a Camel so he could enjoy breathing. "Tell me, was Eddie as good as they said?"

"Sheeit! Back in The City I know a dozen dudes with better voices who can't even get a gig."

"You don't think the gang'll miss Eddie?"

"We'll make out," he said, nibbling a purple earlobe.

A hand slapped the detective on the back. "Mike sweetheart. So glad you got the invitation, but lighten up."

Shayne looked down at the capped-tooth smile of the promoter. "Lucy gave me your message."

"I wanted you to see the guys out of the studio, to meet them as they really are. Up close and personal as they say. Now, tell me, is this a party or what?"

The detective didn't answer.

"Leaves you speechless, doesn't it? Cost me some big bucks, but,

hey, I want the guys fresh, alive, creative for the tour. Did I tell you, Eddie's death has been really good for sales? I got calls today from Knoxville, Boise, San Antonio."

"Looks to me as though your guys are going to be really drained."

"You kidding. They take to this stuff like a babe to candy. Now, *pardon*. I got to go see a man about a horse."

Shayne didn't know whether he meant the bathroom or heroin.

A FEW MINUTES LATER THE REDHEAD LITERALLY BUMPED into Rick Steppe. The drummer was hanging by his knees from a chandelier trying to sip champagne.

"Watch where you're going," said an irritated Steppe. "You're only hired help."

The big detective exorcised an urge to use the profanity-spouting drummer as a speedbag in a late-night workout. "Can we talk?"

"Who are you, Joan Rivers? No, this is a party. Here you use your mouth to drink and eat." He reached into his pocket and pulled out a wad of pills. Just as many ping-ponged on the floor. He threw them in like a kid eating M&M's.

The redhead stopped the drummer's pendulum-like motion. "Why don't you climb down? We'll go into the corner and talk."

"Cut loose, gumshoe." He shoved the detective's hand away. "You're starting to sound like dear, departed Eddie. I thought with him gone I'd finally have some peace. Now lay off."

Shayne was ready to pull the bat-like drummer down when he heard a scream. He ran in its direction and found himself in the kitchen. Shelby White and Elvin Robbins stood facing each other with clenched fists and angry eyes. Sitting on the linoleum floor between them was the girl he recognized from the recording studio.

"She's mine, spade," said Robbins.

"Not tonight, country boy," said White. "The girl wants somebody who can do it, not poop out at the last minute."

"Hey, guys," said the girl, "don't fight. Please! There's enough of me to go round tonight."

Robbins picked up a knife that had been used to slice bread. "When we catch a polecat in the henhouse down home, we skin 'em alive."

"Come and get me, white boy." White motioned with his hands.

Shayne bumped into Robbins. The knife clattered to the floor, and one of the detective's size twelves stepped on it. "Excuse me, guys. Anybody seen the ice?"

"What the hell!" growled Robbins, straightening himself.

"Just be happy the turkey stumbled in here," White said. "I'd have

hated shoving that blade where the sun don't shine!"

Robbins tried to push the redhead aside, but Shayne was immovable. "Oh," said the detective, "you guys know where the bathroom is?"

Robbins was gone by the time the girl got up and draped her fish-belly-white arm over the musician's sweating black shoulders. "Well, Othello," she said, "looks like you got Desdemona all to yourself tonight."

"You got a minute, White?" Shayne said.

"Yeah, but it ain't now. Me and my lady have some private business to transact. Can you dig it?"

"It won't take long."

"With the ladies it never do," snickered White. "Come on, Jessie, let's blow this hole."

The girl shot an angry glance at White. "Angie."

"Hey, babe, I'm sorry. you know I always get you two mixed up. Catch you later, my man," called White over his shoulder as the two exited arms entwined.

Shayne left the kitchen and wandered upstairs. He found the stuff dirty jokes and rock lyrics were made of going on in the rooms. What he didn't find was Johnny Gordon. Nobody had seen the lead singer, or at least they weren't admitting it.

As he came down the circular staircase, the redhead spotted Jan Feldman with a smile on his face, but it was uncharacteristically desperate. The promoter talked and gestured rapidly to two huge guys in ill-fitting sportscoats and polo shirts by the entrance.

"Got a problem with gate-crashers?" Shayne said to the promoter.

"I can handle this, Shayne," said Feldman nervously. "You go enjoy."

"Nobody gonna enjoy nutin' till you come up with what you owe," said one of the gorillas.

"Guys," smiled Feldman, "you know I'm good for it. Haven't I always come through. Aren't I promoting the largest tour in the history of the record industry? I'm just experiencing what the trades call a temporary problem with my cash flow."

"Your breathin' is gonna be temporary too if you don't come across—now," warned the other visitor.

"Articulate, isn't he?" quipped the redhead.

"Hey, buddy," said the other tough, "Keep outta this or you're gonna be sucking wind through a broken nose."

"Hey, Jay," said Shayne, "maybe you ought to take these two on as clients. A little rough around the edges, but they've obviously got the talent to be the next Bob and Ray."

The tough not intimidating Feldman reached for the redhead. Shayne grabbed his wrist, showed him his palm, and forced him to his knees. "Of course, Jay, you might want to hire me. Watch my lips. They never move while my dummy screams his head off." Shayne twisted.

The tough began to yell.

His partner let go of Feldman. In the narrow hallway he was unable to circle around behind the redhead. Still grasping the wrist, the big detective raised his knee and kicked.

The tough fell backward, clutching his groin and moaning.

"Not bad," said the detective. "My lips never moved, and I got both of them to speak."

The kneeling figure swung his arm backward catching the redhead in the knee. Shayne stumbled. The tough lowered his head and charged.

The detective opened the hall closet suddenly. The huge figure smashed into the door, his head cracking the wood. Shayne interlocked his fingers and brought his hands down on the tough's exposed neck. The gorilla dropped onto the Persian rug and didn't move.

The other figure had gotten to his knees. Shayne hit him with an uppercut, then a left. A roundhouse right ended the contest and dropped the first figure on the second. Shayne looked down at the carpet. It was a fitting entrance piece—a perverted version of what he had seen when he had arrived.

It was bad enough to stand downwind of a garbage dump, but to get your hands in it? The redhead opened the front door and stepped out into the cool night air. Life still smelled stale, used.

As he got into the Buick, he picked up the mobile phone and buzzed Rourke. The detective had a bad feeling in his gut even before he asked his reporter friend what he had found out.

"Well, Shamus, I had to do a lot of digging on this one. After checking through a dozen dummy corporations, though, I discovered Zanadoo Records is owned by Miami's latest Crime Czar of the Month."

"Simon Caine."

"How did you know?"

The drugs, the punk rock-looking prostitutes, the muscle—it all fit. Simon Caine had cooked up quite a dish for the rockers, and his secret ingredient might well have been death.

## VIII

IN THE DISTANT EAST THE ORANGE EYE SQUINTED AS though it couldn't decide whether or not to rise. Shayne had no such

choice. He had gotten up well before dawn, dressed in the dark-blue warm-up suit Lucy had given him the Christmas before, and parked the Buick at the public beach.

After stretching a few minutes he began jogging, making certain to run just above the high point of where the waves lapped upon the beach. Two miles south by his estimates he spotted the faint outlines of his target. Instinctively his right hand went to the small of his back, but he had left the .38 in the trunk.

Simon Caine, he had found out, was first and foremost a day person. The gang lord who sat at the best table in his restaurant until all hours of the night was a Hollywood cliché, but a dead breed. A Harvard education had replaced street smarts. Were Al Capone alive today, he'd be lucky to rise as high as the two gunsels at Feldman's party. Today's top hoods were more at home talking greenmail, investment tax credits, high interest loans, and computer software rather than whether to hit Vinnie on the southside. And Caine had a reputation for making laundered money work.

The detective had been on the phone late into the night calling in some markers and mortgaging his soul. Still, if the figure in the maroon sweatsuit he saw approaching were Caine, he'd call the ledger balanced.

Keeping pace with the figure was a four-footed bodyguard that probably answered to Hans or Fritz and cost as much as a Mercedes. The ocean breeze had already carried the redhead's scent ahead, for the dog reacted. Shayne didn't slacken his pace. He had some information that needed confirming or denying from the man on top.

When they were a scant twenty yards apart, the maroon-suit stopped. The jet-black Doberman moved into a motionless ready position ahead of its master.

Shayne halted.

"This is a private beach, fella," said, the maroon-suit, "and Prince hasn't had his breakfast yet."

"Mr. Caine, I'm Mike Shayne. I need to talk to you."

"Then do like everybody else. Make an appointment through my downtown office."

"I don't have the time."

The dog tensed. Its short hairs bristled on the back of its neck.

"I'm going to pull out my wallet," said the detective.

"Do it slowly or you're Alpo."

Shayne moved deliberately and held up his I.D. "I think you'd rather conduct this business outside of your office. It's about Jay Feldman."

"I've heard the name, both yours and Feldman's."

"You're probably going to hear this morning how last night I . . ."

"Roughed up a couple of my men."

"Gorillas is a better description."

"Guys like Marko and Brian are necessary evils in the business world. I'd love to think I could collect everything owed me merely by sending out duns. Tell me, have you ever seen the lengthy list of delinquent tax bills published in the newspapers?"

"Yeah."

"Well, I'm private, not public, and my clientele aren't always model citizens. I need a better rate of collection than municipal government if I'm to survive."

"Nice point."

Caine said, "Can you jog and talk?"

"Sure."

THE REDHEAD REALIZED QUICKLY THAT THEY WERE JOG-  
ging at a faster pace than he had been using. He also knew instantly he was being tested. Somehow no matter what the case it always came to this. Well, so be it! Caine's face looked to be in its mid-forties, but his body functioned with the smoothness of a twenty-year-old. Always ahead, as though a point man on patrol, the Doberman loped with a rhythm that belied its ferocity.

"Two years ago," said Caine without breaking his respiratory cycle, "I was out for a run, and my bodyguards kept falling back. I got lucky. The two stiffs who tried to kidnap me were amateurs, and I was able to jump out of the van on Miami Avenue. That's when I bought the Prince of Darkness. \$20,000 he cost me, and he's the only one of my investments truly worth what I paid."

"Interesting," said the detective. "What did you pay Feldman?"

"I loaned the man enough to cover his losses at Hialeah and elsewhere. Instead of repaying me, that ex-barker wanted another hit."

"He got deeper in debt."

"It happens. I finally agreed to help him when he put up that hotshot band of his as collateral."

"And Feldman still hasn't repaid you?"

"How often do longshots really finish first?"

"So you actually own Death?"

"In a manner of speaking."

"Which makes it easy to supply them with a few sweets?"

"I run a diversified company. I like to keep my thumb in my investments and my clients happy."

"No matter whether its toked, snorted, swallowed, injected, or



laid."

"Crude, but accurate."

"Why the muscle last night?"

"You ease off some guys, and they forget their debts. Then the investment is lost. Last night was a string around the thumb of Mr. Feldman."

"And the night before?"

"What do you mean?"

"Eddie Kelly's death."

"The way I hear it, some idiot, and there are a lot of them in the entertainment business, got his wires crossed. Besides, why would I damage my own investment? Look, I'm no expert on rock music. Who is? But I keep tabs on my entire portfolio, and my people tell me that without Kelly they're gonna be just another bunch of screaming kids with the musical range of Bach's little finger."

The detective picked up the pace even faster. A test worked two ways. Caine followed without breathing hard. Sweat and surf spray rolled off both men.

"So," concluded Shayne, "you're saying you use figures, not bodies, to balance your books?"

"I put the tommy-gun and fedora in mothballs long ago. And speaking of changes, I'll bet you don't even own a trenchcoat."

"Touche. But one thing hasn't changed."

"What?"

"You might work in a high-tech office and I might carry a .38 Smith & Wesson instead of a roscoe, but let's not try to kid each other. We still work opposite sides of the street."

Caine pulled up. Wiping his forehead with a maroon sleeve, he looked into the big detective's eyes. "Have you ever read *What Color Is Your Parachute?*"

"No."

"You ought to. It's a book about switching jobs in mid-career. I don't usually conduct job interviews on the beach, but I can use someone like you in my organization. I've always thought I could tell a lot about a man by the way he handles himself physically."

"Oh?"

"Yes." Caine glanced at his multi-dialed wristwatch. "We just ran a 5:03 mile on the sand. Not too many guys your size could handle that. You've got initiative, communication skills, savvy. Believe me, Shayne, I can make a move worthwhile."

The investigator shifted his weight. "There's just one problem with your offer."

"What's that?"

"I never run on your side of the street."

SHAYNE THREW THE SOFT TOWEL OVER HIS SHOULDER AS he stepped out of the steamy shower. The phone was ringing.

"Shayne here."

"Mike sweetheart," came the familiar voice of Jay Feldman, "I've got some bad news."

"Shoot."

"I'm at the beachhouse. Johnny just dropped by Rick's room to check on him. You remember Rick—was feeling no pain at last night's bash?"

"So?"

"Well, to make a long story short and all that, Johnny found Rick in his jacuzzi—dead."

## IX

ON THE DRIVE OVER THE CAUSEWAY SHAYNE FOUND HIS mind fixating on a movie he had seen long ago in which two men, in order to avoid suspicion, had agreed to exchange murders. First, Eddie Kelly's death and now Rick Steppe's. Was what Edward Kelly, Sr. had told him the day before about a bargain between two drunk and teed-off fathers merely a coincidence?

The redhead pulled the Buick once again into the circular drive. In the early-morning haze of his mind the Caddies and Ferraris seemed more real than the black-and-white Fords and yellow tape that had replaced them. Shayne had the same used-up stench in his nose.

Gabriel Horne was screaming at Feldman in front of the door. "I tried to tell you something like this would happen, but you wouldn't listen, big mouth."

Feldman said, "Gabe, don't get so up tight. It'll work. Trust me."

"That's the trouble. I did. But no more, hotshot. I'm getting out of here." He shoved him aside.

"What's he so mad about?" said the redhead.

"Ah, artistic control. Everybody wants it, but like Rick Nelson said, 'You can't please everybody.'"

Feldman met him and escorted him through the police line and flotsam, human and otherwise, from the party.

As they entered the house, which reeked of pot and booze, the promoter shook his head. "Eddie's death really hyped the gate, but Steppe. This is getting ridiculous. Say, you wouldn't happen to pound

the skins, would you?"

Shayne glared back.

"Just kidding, Mike sweetheart." He stopped in front of one of the previous night's bars. "I could use a drink. You?"

"It's a bit early."

"In showbiz, early and late are meaningless. We run our lives by a different clock." He poured himself a glass of vodka and added a shot of orange juice. "A day without sunshine and all that."

"Where's Steppe's body?"

The pulp sticking to his thick lips, Feldman said, "The police took it about fifteen minutes ago."

"Where's his room?"

"Second floor, third door on the left. Are you going . . ."

"Jay, my man," interrupted Gordon. "Just the one I need."

Staring at Death's new lead singer, the investigator knew he had seen winos in better condition. Gordon's eyes were glossy and half-shut. His body shook, almost convulsing.

"I need bread, Jay," said the musician. "I gotta make a touch."

Feldman looked around hurriedly, then pushed the singer into a curtained corner. "You crazy, Flash? we got wall-to-wall uniforms here."

"I, I know," he slurred. "I just got through talking with a Lieutenant Frye. That's why I need . . ."

"Damn you! Check yourself out, motor-mouth. You look like you just got back from a round trip on Colombian Airways."

"Hey, I'm cool."

"Sure you are," he said ironically. "You're also into me for the next three-month's allowance."

"Jay, just this one more time. I mean, how many grams can you get for one K, and those goodies we get at parties aren't enough."

Feldman slapped him hard. Gordon stumbled to one knee and wrapped his arm's around the promoter's leg. "O.K., I'm begging. Can't you see? All I got left is a coupla hundred."

"Get lost."

Shayne felt acid in his stomach. The vacant eyes, the shaking, the sweat. It all nauseated him. But you couldn't escape it. It thrived as much in the stuccoed villas of the Beach as it did in tenements like Miami's Black Hole. The result was always the same—wasted lives. The most poisonous serpent in the garden was drugs, and the vipers seemed to be multiplying. Everybody was saying, "No, never me," but the serpent, knowing neither color nor class, kept sinking its deadly fangs deeper.

Revolted anew, the detective grabbed Feldman by the collar. "You make me sick."

"Don't over-react, Mike. I'm not the black hat in this scenario. Old Jay does nothing more or less than give the boys what they want to be happy. It's their weaknesses talking, not mine."

The no-fault society strikes again. Shayne could see debating ethics with an amoral man was a dead-end street. "I'm going upstairs and look around. Make sure you're here when I come down."

"Sure, Mike. Believe me, I know what you're going through. We're all upset about this thing."

As Feldman threw down another screwdriver, the detective wished he could turn his back on the whole affair. But he had a contract, and Mike Shayne always fulfilled his obligations.

The redhead recognized the investigating detective in Steppe's room. Frye was one of the few people on Petey Painter's force who put the law before loyalty to their chief.

"What've we got, Benny?" he said.

"What are you doing on the wrong side of the bay, Mike?"

"A dirty job."

"I know. Somebody's got to do it." He laughed self-consciously.

"Something like that."

Frye pointed to a built-in redwood tub that sat in the center of the huge room. "Note the position of the plug in the floor. About two feet from the jacuzzi. See the hairdryer still plugged in. Assistant M.E. places the time of death between 11:00 and 1:00 A.M."

Shayne stared at the blue object sitting on the surface like a fishing lure. "Accident?"

"I won't get Forensic's report until tomorrow, but look around the rug. There're enough pills to start a pharmacy. It's dollars to donuts our victim didn't know what hit him."

"Was he alone?"

"Looks that way. Gordon claims that's how he found him."

Shayne noticed a Turkish towel on the bed across the room. He pointed at it. "That's Steppe's?"

"No, the victim was naked."

The redhead touched the terri-cloth. It was wet. "Your boys over here?"

"Not yet. You got anything?"

"Don't know yet. Be sure they take a look at this. I'll be in touch."

AS HE CAME DOWN THE STAIRS, SHAYNE NOTICED FELDMAN and Gordon had moved into the library. The promoter was peeling

money from a wad and handing it over. Something rang wrong.

"You earned it this time," said Feldman. "Now sober up. I want you at Zanadoo at 2:00. We've got a recording session right after the funeral, and you'd better sing your little heart out."

"Thanks, man," said Gordon, rushing past Shayne.

"What made you change your mind?"

"Oh, the dough. Come on, Mike. I may be tough, but I'm not without heart, and besides, check this out. A little something Flash didn't show the boys in blue." He pulled a piece of paper from his coat pocket and spread it out on the desk.

Shayne looked down. *Deja vu*. Another note made of cut-out, pasted words. **DOWN THE WAY TO DUSTY DEATH GOES NUMBER TWO.**

"You stupid—" Shayne started. "Did you show this to Lt. Frye?"

"You think I'm crazy. You know how in all the old movies the cops tell everybody they're investigating, 'Don't leave town'? Well, we gotta leave town in four days or we're out millions."

"You withhold evidence, and your only trip will be upstate to Raiford."

"Mike, Mike. Listen, I played the model citizen with Eddie's death over in Miami. They didn't believe me. These overworked schlemiels aren't going to either."

"Frye," the detective called loudly, "get down here."

"You're nuts, Shayne. Just remember who hired you."

The policeman came scurrying down the stairs. "What do you want, Mike?"

"Mr. Feldman, model citizen that he is, has something found beside the body you might be interested in." He pointed at the desk.

Frye took a quick look. "Damn straight! The lab boys will want to look at this." He took off out the front door.

Feldman said, "Shayne, if I didn't need you, I'd fire you."

The redhead ignored the threat. "I had a little talk this morning with Simon Caine."

Feldman looked momentarily like his tour had been canceled. Then, his face broke into its usual sales-pitch smile. "Hey, what that shmuck says is about as valid as *The National Inquirer*, everybody knows that for years he's been trying to get a foot in the entertainment door."

"The way he talks, he's already got a leg in."

"You wanna listen to his song, that's your business. But then tell me why his two bozos who visited here last night were still trying to get me to sign a contract with him. But it won't work. Nobody pushes Jay Feldman around."

"Those two goons seemed to be doing a good job."

"Hey, model citizen," said a returning Frye as he spun the promoter around, "I want to talk with you about a couple of things."

"Oh?"

"A little technicality called withholding evidence and a report from MPD about another note."

"Hey," said the promoter with his best glad-hand smile, "did I forget to tell you about that." He chuckled aloud.

Lt. Bennie Frye was not amused.

## X

THE MUSCULAR FIGURE WAS NAKED TO THE WAIST where tight jeans accentuated his manhood. His long, thick hair hung amply onto his shoulders. The wide smile across his boyish face lay somewhere between a mischievous grin and a malicious smirk.

"Do you like my poster?" said Kiki Burke on entering her office. "Sorry to keep you waiting."

"Hard to believe he's a rock idol," said the detective, noting the less than handsome face.

"Diamond David Roth of Van Halen. Any time he wants he can jump on these young bones. The hunk is . . ."

"Don't tell me—H-O-T," he said with exaggerated aspiration.

"You took the breath right out of my mouth. That up there is the essence of rock. Its real attraction—whether it's the look, the beat, the sound, the rhythm—is sex, raw sex. With both the get-down-and-dirty Stones or squeaky-clean Menudo, rock says to a bunch of afraid-to-admit-they're-scared pubescents, that those strange feelings throughout their body are natural, that everybody has them."

"I come to ask a simple question and I get a philosophical explanation of the implications of popular music."

"And you didn't even have to buy a copy of the *Daily News*." She pirouetted. "Tell me, what do you think of the new me?"

Shayne noticed for the first time that her hair was now a deep purple.

"I can tell you like it," she said tugging a few strands out of their natural fall. "Claude, my hairdresser, calls it 'Melancholy Mauve.' After what you said when last we met, I figured you were right. I needed something more appropriate for the funeral at noon."

"Kelly's death really hit you that hard?"

"*Certainment!* And think of the scads of gorgeous people who'll be there paying their last respects. I mean, if the public wanted only record reviews, they could watch *American Bandstand*."

Shayne lit up a Camel and shook his head. "I don't know which

overwhelms me more—your hair or your sensitivity.”

“Don’t be that way, Mikey. I have to be like a doctor—objective, uninvolved. After all, I am a music journalist, and I have an obligation to my profession.”

Why did he feel he had been through a similar debate recently? It wasn’t just the loud music, the purple hair—it was a totally different set of values, and he felt all left feet in their world. “O.K., journalist, can you give me any specifics about Death’s finances?”

“I’m no stockbroker, but it’s funny you should ask. After your previous questions I tried to check out their stock. A rumor’s been circulating the last few months that for all they’ve made they’re desperate to stay afloat. Can your stylus groove on that? A group with five platinum and two Grammys nearly broke.”

“Why?”

“I told you I’m no stockbroker. Why don’t you ask a banker.”

“Good idea,” said Shayne. “I think I will.”

NORMALLY THE DETECTIVE HATED WAITING EVEN MORE than overcooked shrimp, but as he sat in the high-rent-district outside office of E. Malcom Kelly, Investments, he was glad to have the soothing muzak and a few minutes to himself. The events of the last day and a half had happened so quickly he needed time to pull back, to put the pieces together.

Item One. Both victims had enough enemies to overfill the Greater Miami phonebook.

Item Two. While it was barely possible the victims had been done in by separate killers, the facts surrounding their deaths suggested a single murderer. The notes were sequential and their language quite similar.

Item Three. Even though anybody could have gotten into Steppe’s room without being noticed amidst the chaos of the drug party, security and the layout at the concert was such that only a few insiders had both access to the equipment and time to cross the wires. He was betting against the Boyfriends and Parents of America.

Item Four. *The Strangers on a Train* Theory. The more he thought, the less likely it seemed. Besides, before coming by he had made a quick check into George Steppe that turned up the shoe magnate had spent most of the night of Kelly’s death in the MPD drunk tank on a DUI. And, any number of witnesses could place Eddie Kelly, Sr. and George Steppe on Commodore Postwaite’s yacht till almost dawn, and if neither man did one killing, neither did either. Of course either could have hired a killer. They were the type used to having others do their dirty work.

Item Five. Instead of a phone book, he had his suspect list pared down to the size of a Chinese menu. In column A, the insiders. The Duck, Flash, Robbins, and The Shellfish. All had reasons and opportunity. In column B, the pros. Horne's temper, his possible jealousy over the group's success, and his fight before the concert with Eddie pushed him into the runner-up spot. At the top of the charts, Jay Feldman with all his financial problems, and if Eddie had spotted something in the books, something maybe he had told his old friend Rick Steppe . . .

Item Six hit Shayne suddenly. Kiki Burke. She had admitted to being at the concert. He should have asked her where she was the night of the party. She certainly could have blended in without being noticed. Motive? She knew a lot about the group, and maybe in her digging she had uncovered something she shouldn't have. A long shot, but once in a blue moon over Miami they paid off.

"Shayne," interrupted a voice, "I bet you're wondering why I'm not at the funeral."

The redhead stood up to confront Eddie's father. Despite the expensive suit and the silk tie, his eyes look tired and red, his demeanor pale. "Actually, I was thinking about . . ."

"You're right," said Kelly without listening. "I should have gone." He held open the door to his office. The detective walked in. The counselor walked around to the corner windows. "It wasn't Eddie I couldn't face. It was myself."

"You don't have to tell me this," said Shayne, seeing the telltale signs of a powerful undercurrent coming to the surface.

Kelly seemed to be staring at his own reflection in the glass. "From the day he was born Teresa and I vied for him. Not out of love, but of egotism. I wanted him to be everything I was—she likewise. We both lost. In the end he just wanted to be himself and walked out on us."

Shayne could hear the sobs, first like a boat far at sea and then as it docks. He felt awkward, dirty, as though he had opened a door that was none of his business. How had Kiki Burke described her attitude toward her work? Objective. It was an impossible stance. The more you looked, the more you found, and the closer you got. Emotions, they were the methane gas, the asbestos of his profession.

He sat silently.

When he had regained a measure of composure, Kelly said, "It's too late to make it up to my son. Tell me, is there anything I can do to help you find his killer?"

Shayne resisted an urge to light a cigarette. "I've been exploring the possibility that all Death's business transactions aren't on the up and



up. Do you know anything about them?"

"When Eddie started with that group, I got them to put their money into growth stocks, tax-free municipal bonds. That's another thing we argued about before he took all that out of my hands. I guess I failed him twice—once as a father and once as a professional."

"Who handles it now?"

"From what I hear, Horne and Feldman have some sort of deal with a shrewd shark who operates just outside the reach of the SEC and IRS."

"Then you know about Simon Caine?"

"You don't go into the water without first checking for sharks." For the first time he faced the detective. "Why don't you wander down to the second floor. There's a cafeteria there. Put whatever you want on my tab. In the meantime I'll make a few inquiries."

ONE LONDON BROIL GRILLED IN CHARCOAL AND FORTY-five minutes later Shayne wandered back into the investment office.

"Go right in," said the grayhaired secretary the redhead was sure Mrs. Kelly had chosen. "He's expecting you."

Kelly had his shirtsleeves rolled up. The color had returned to his face, and his eyes seemed truly alive.

"Whenever you pick up an odor," said the investment counselor, "there's usually spoiled fish around somewhere."

"They teach you that in college?"

"Like you, I've learned something on the streets." He lifted a yellow legal pad. "Listen to this. Have you ever heard of Bel Ami Enterprises?"

"No."

"It's the umbrella for Feldman's various business ventures. He's got an amusement park in Connecticut, a small club in Tallahassee, you name it. All have one other thing in common."

"What?"

"They're insolvent. You understand check-kiting?"

"Basically, you open a lot of accounts. You overspend on A, and cover it with B. B also has insufficient funds, so you cover it with C and so-on."

"And Feldman operates on an interstate level. On top of that he seems to be trying to hide some of his investments from Caine."

"That's because he's into the shark for a lot of money."

"Exactly."

"Simon Caine impressed me as a thorough professional. How has Feldman managed to keep him from catching on?"

"Two ways. First, our promoter loves to play the fool."

"The second?"

"Bankrolling him is a silent partner who long ago paid off his debt to the mob."

"Who?"

"Gabriel Horne."

KIKI BURKE WAS PACING IN FRONT OF ZANADOO RECORDS when Shayne arrived.

"You leave a message for me to rush right over and meet you here, and then you're late. What gives, Mikey?"

"You'll find out," said the detective. "I got caught on the phone."

"Something going on inside?"

"A recording session, and I phoned ahead to make sure everybody would be here."

"*Au contraire*. They're not going to let a music journalist inside while the red light is on. Do you know how paranoid these groups are about someone stealing their stuff?"

"They'll let you in."

"How can you be sure?"

"You're with me."

"Oh!" She interlocked her arm with his. "Lead on, Tarzan."

Shayne didn't bother asking the gun-chewing secretary where the studio was. Despite the warning light, he walked in, striking a chair, where from the books on it, Angie had been sitting. In a chain reaction the literature texts spilled on the floor. The redhead picked them up and set them down loudly on the metal surface.

"Not again, Shayne," said Gordon. "With comic routines like that, you and the Duck ought to team up."

His Irish temper getting the best of him, the detective said, "I've had about enough of his cesspool." He looked around the recording studio quickly. "Everybody's not here."

"Hold it," said Burduck. "I've seen this scene before. The Great Detective gathers all the suspects in a single room . . ."

"And he says," finished the Shellfish in a deep, melodramatic voice, "'I suppose you're wondering why I've called you all together.'"

Shayne crossed the studio quickly and grabbed the Afroed bass player by the belt and neck. Giving him the bum's rush, he rammed his head through the bass drum. "Now that I have your attention."

"What's going on?" said Feldman. "And why is that gossip columnist here?"

The redhead avoided the question. "Where are the others?"

Robbins said, "I think I saw Horne diddlybopping into Studio B when I got here."

"I noticed Angie go in the same room as we came back from that break a few minutes ago," said Burduck from the floor.

"Guess he was finally going to get his turn at bat with her," said Shelby White.

"Just like he always wanted to do with her sister Jessie," said Gordon.

From out in the hallway came a barely audible scream.

Shayne threw open the door.

Nobody was in the corridor.

The scream blared.

Shayne looked up. The sound was coming from the speaker over the door into Studio B.

He bolted down the corridor. The others followed behind. The detective tried the door.

"Locked," he announced.

"Knock it down with your shoulder," urged White.

"The last thing I need is a broken collar bone," said Shayne. Bracing his back against the opposite wall, the redhead lifted both feet and kicked out.

The wooden door shattered inward.

In a torn t-shirt and short-shorts, Angie stood over the prostrate figure of Gabriel Horne. Using a stand-up microphone like a baseball bat, she flailed away at the motionless body. Blood splattered everywhere, causing the studio to look like a slaughterhouse.

Finally she stopped. Then, noticing she wasn't alone, she said, "Thank, thank God you're here. He tried to . . . he grabbed . . . he . . . I told him no . . . he said if those punks could, why . . ." She fell to her knees and dropped her weapon. Burying her face in her bloody hands, she began to weep.

"Not again," said Burduck.

"If this doesn't make the cover of *Rolling Stone*," said Kiki Burke.

"There goes the tour," said Feldman, "and my only chance to get back on my feet."

Shayne rasped his rough thumbnail across his granite chin. "Tell me, Angie," he said, helping the still-sobbing woman to her feet, "what was the note going to say this time?"

She pulled away and retreated like a scolded dog into the corner of the room.

"Angie?" said Gordon.

Burduck started, "But she's just . . ."

Shayne said, "Like muzak. Always there, never noticed. Made it easy for you, didn't it, Angie?"

"Her?" said Kiki Burke incredulously. "She killed Kelly and Steppe?"

"Had she enough time," said the redhead, "she'd have gotten the entire group."

"But why?" said the purple-haired reporter.

"Revenge," said the detective.

"For Jessie?" said White.

"Angie's sister," said Kiki.

"God," said Robbins, "I'm glad this whole thing is over."

"We didn't want for it to happen to Jessie," said Gordon. "She was just a fun kid."

"What really did happen to her?" said Shayne.

"They killed her," said Angie. "The bastards used her up and then killed her."

"But she committed suicide," protested Burduck.

Angie lashed out. "Only when she couldn't take any more of being your whore. You took an innocent kid, fed her with booze, pills and stories about how big you were, and then you passed her around as if she were nothing more than a six-pack of Schlitz. But I got even for her. And he's right," she said, glaring at Shayne with wild eyes, "I would have killed all of you if I could." The hatred froze her face.

Shelby White sat down on the padded floor and shook his head. "If only there was something we could do."

The reporter said, "How did you know Angie was the killer?"

"I didn't for a long time. Then some things started to come together. From the notes left with the bodies, the killer was a literate person. At first I figured on White, the former high school English teacher. Unlike me he wouldn't have had to look up John Donne and William Shakespeare in *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*. The morning after the party I found a still-wet towel, which I got Lt. Frye to analyze. In fact, I was late getting here because he was on the horn with the news his lab boys had found in it strands of platinum-dyed hair. That's when it hit me there was somebody else here with a literary background of sorts. When I came into Studio C the first time, she put down a book. I also remembered her the night of the party referring to White as Othello, one of Shakespeare's characters. Her collection of lit books by the door today solidified my suspicion." The redhead fired up a Camel. "I just wish I had gotten here sooner."

"What happens now?" said Kiki, her voice somber for the first time.

"The police should be arriving any second," said Shayne.

"Hey, guys," said Feldman, trying to conjure up a smile on his face and theirs, "the worst is behind us now. If we get it in gear, there's still time to pull off the big tour. After all, we owe it to our fans."

"Stuff it, Jay," said a disgusted Burdack.

"*You* can still have your tour, Feldman," said the detective. "Maybe get to see some of the small, out-of-the-way towns in America."

"What are you talking about?" said the promoter.

Shayne smiled wryly. "Well, Jay sweetheart, when I discovered how you and your silent partner had been systematically bilking the band, I could have called the SEC or the IRS."

"But, but you didn't?"

"Hell, no," said Shayne.

"Oh, great," said Feldman.

"I called the person who would be most interested in your little shell game with Bel Ami."

"Oh, crap."

"Close," said the redhead. "I had a little talk about hidden funds with Simon Caine."

Shayne met the uniformed policeman coming down the corridor. He was glad to turn things over to them and exit the top-forty world. At the very least his clothes needed fumigating. Maybe it was time for a vacation.

As he walked through the reception area, the secretary blew a bubble and flipped on the stereo. The voice of Eddie Kelly wailed out, "You'll be the death of me."

It couldn't have ended any other way.



## Listen to Chester Morris

Hollywood's own Chester Morris, whose famous "Boston Blackie" movie series was perhaps the forerunner of all the detective pictures, will be heard on radio in his own series as Private Eye, Ed Noon in "The Windup". You'll have a chance to match your wits against Ed Noon and try to guess who the guilty party is.

*It was a game—a deadly game—but I was as good as any of them!*

# The Vertebrae Of A Long Snake

by IZAK BOUWER

I MIGHT AS WELL TELL THE STORY. THE TELLING COULD be therapeutic and somebody might learn from it, who knows?

On a Friday afternoon during the summer of 1976—the summer of the Olympic Games in Montreal—I parked my car near the campus branch of my bank in Fredericton, in New Brunswick, Canada. A young man, who looked somewhat older than the average student, approached me.

“Are you Professor Venter?”

“Yes?”

“I’ve got a message for you—from someone who said that you would know who he is. He asked that you meet him in the airport cafeteria at 8:30 on Tuesday morning.”

“I’m sorry, I don’t know who . . .”

“He said that I should call you by the name of Penkop. Is that right: Penkop?”

I could not answer immediately. A part of my life that I thought had been closed forever behind me, suddenly yawned wide. It was as if a mouth had fastened onto my stomach area, with a jolt, and vitality had started to drain away into the bleak corridors of that existence.

The man’s eyes were resting on me. I know the look, thank you. I knew the game, and I was as good a player as any.

"Yes," I answered. "It's been a while. How will I know your friend?"

"I don't know. That was all he said. Except that you should be ready to fly. O.K.?"

The man smiled. He waved, crossed the road, and started walking down the hill.

To me it seemed as if he was walking down a corridor, leaving me standing in some sunlit prison courtyard in South Africa, looking at the small, barred windows, not knowing if I was in or out.

AT 8:15 THAT TUESDAY MORNING, THE TAXI STOPPED AT the front entrance of the airport building. I went through the doors carrying my suitcase and a briefcase. Inside, a tall man with a moustache walked over to me.

"I'm Neville. Here, let me help you. We'll check your stuff in at the Air Canada counter. You're booked on the 9:45 flight to Montreal."

He produced a ticket from his pocket, made out in my name. We checked the luggage and walked to the cafeteria. He got us a couple of coffees at the counter and we sat down at a table near the window.

"A lovely day for travel," he said. He stirred his coffee and continued normally: "You will check in at the Westcliff Hotel. Your room there is booked for two nights in the name of Johnny Hardy. Your return flight is on Thursday morning."

He reached into his pocket and brought out a small key, which he placed on the table.

"At three o'clock this afternoon you are to go to the downtown bus terminal, which is near your hotel, and collect a parcel there from a locker. The number is on the key. Your instructions will be in an envelope."

I took the key. I knew that I did not need to ask for any further information. Essentially, Neville and I had nothing more to say to each other, besides ordinary words of human contact. This kind of business was like that. A few minutes of interchange, followed by a period of days or weeks of nondescript neutrality, with or without danger. You waited in airports, you traveled by bus or car or train. You read the newspaper, or listened to people talking. You just parked yourself in neutral.

"Have you ever been to South Africa?" I asked him.

"No," he said. "I spent a few years in Kenya, though."

We finished our coffees.

He shook my hand.

"Take care."

I WAS WAITING IN LINE TO ENTER THE BOARDING AREA when I swayed a little, almost missing a step. I thought, *On my Lord*. A buzzing noise tugged at the corners of my consciousness. I looked back to see if Neville was around but, of course, he had left. On the fringes of my mind there were movements like birds flapping their wings. *Aw hell*, I thought, knowing full well what was up. The chemical could not have been part of my breakfast, since I had that too early. It must have been in my coffee.

At the same time I became aware of a disturbance in the lobby. A young Indian had stumbled in through the glass doors and was making vague gestures towards passers-by while mumbling to himself. A sinking feeling crept into my stomach. Why was it that whenever I felt especially vulnerable, there would be crisis events materializing as out of thin air?

The birds in my mind had changed into whirring demons that fluttered and pranced past my eyes, with clattering beaks and bright eyes, and with shoulder feathers that glistened in the sun. I would soon not be able to act normally.

Holding on to my briefcase, I moved towards the security guard that was keeping an area cleared around the Indian squatting on the floor. I touched the guard's arm.

"Sir, don't be alarmed. I need your assistance."

He looked at me standing there, slightly swaying, and for a moment he appeared utterly nonplused. I took out my wallet and opened it. I was shaking. He bent towards me and I whispered: "Will you please get somebody to assist me . . . onto the plane . . . and stay with me . . . until we get to Montreal?"

I realized that the more closely he leaned towards me, the more softly I whispered, so that he experienced some difficulty hearing me. In any case, he seemed to get the message. He guided me to a seat.

"Yes, sir. Please stay right here."

NEVILLE MUST HAVE PUT THE STUFF IN THE COFFEE. BUT why? If Penkop was to perform a mission, then why do that to him? Before major missions, I was sometimes given such substances in order to psych me up, but it was always done in seclusion, in an appropriate setting and with due care given to the right frame of mind. Never haphazardly or in public. Larger questions were coming to the fore: What was my mission to be?

I knew that I could cope with the dosage, even though it was shaping up into a dilly. Coping with this kind of substance was something I



learned to manage during my stay in a South African rehabilitation center. I was kept in a cell. The food was laced with weird chemicals. Music and voice recordings were piped into the cell, and observing eyes and ears were around. It was there, in that center, that I developed the ability to explore parts of my subliminal mind and acquired the reputation of being a psychic.

Many years ago, when I first applied for a job at a government institution in Pretoria, I had to wait in a waiting room. There were several other people around, but they all left. And through a peephole in the ceiling a lone eye was watching me. Of course, I did not know that at the time. The eye belonged to an old college friend of mine, too. I knew that he was employed as a psychologist in their Personnel department, but I was never told about the device of the observing eye. So, how did I come to know about it?

It was years later, in that rehabilitation center, that I realized that my subliminal faculty had observed the fact and had kept it on record. Beginning with that realization, I continued to learn how to access the files in the deeper recesses of my mind. In the psychedelic daze of that prison, with its narrow, barred windows and sunlit courtyard, I discovered my ability to do that. I could "see" the eyes, and even the personalities behind the eyes, as they watched me through mirrors or peepholes, and I could "see" the ears listening through microphones. I was able to unravel, with greater or lesser success, the contents of messages subliminally contained on recordings piped into the cell. At first, the time lag was considerable: weeks or even months could elapse before the content would finally crystallize and become known to me. But the mere fact that I could do it was important to me, and my ability improved with time.

It was also in that same center that I learned to appreciate what I called my "natural voice." Oh, thank God for that voice. It talked and flowed and refreshed like clear water. It spoke faithfully and naturally and egolessly of the things happening to me.

I might add that in that same rehabilitation center I also developed my considerable respect for the figures and symbols of authority. The guards appeared to me like lords or gods that inhabited corridors of a superior society. Their uniforms were magnificent, and on their shoulders they bore insignia that glistened golden in the light.

IN THE AIRPORT LOUNGE THEY WERE PLAYING SOFT music and I floated upwards inside the dome of a huge cathedral. Beautiful rays of light streamed inside and around us. My being was part of a song celebrating the vital current of life.

The Indian on the floor was trying to get up. He looked at me and although we were several yards apart, our faces seemed almost to be touching. I realized then that he was not drunk at all, as I thought at first, but under the influence of a chemical, like me. Our beings interlocked and I saw his eyes grow large as he realized that something unusual was happening. In the interior of the cathedral a message took shape. "The word is Love," it said. His being, like a strong current that had been gathering strength against a barrier, burst through and flowed into mine. I then knew that he had crossed a sea of darkness and was safe.

The people around us were looking, some directly and some covertly, not only at the Indian but, I imagined, also at me. Oh, if only they could have a glimpse inside, at the place where the vibrations emanated, I thought, and smiled, my head tipping slightly askew on my shoulders. Our type of person moved with a purpose beyond our immediate circumstances, transcending them, in a region where the human machine hummed and sang at a hundred times its ordinary pace. As we walked or talked or did whatever things we had to do, inside we were flying. We were on that route that took us into air lanes of the psyche that were practically unknown to most people, because it was so hard to reach them. But some knew how to get there. Outstanding athletes knew how to travel in those lanes. Outstanding artists knew. And evangelists. Outstanding men and women in any field know.

We all sang the song of our beings there.

In the South African *veld*, where I was trained after my rehabilitation was complete, I sang my song, too. We were thrown into a black pit but I came up laughing. I was taught to eat rats and other things to survive, and I could not stop laughing. Like the Indian, who was getting up from the floor.

An officer was talking to him.

There was also someone talking to me:

"Do you feel able to walk?"

I had momentarily forgotten why he was supposed to be around me. Then I saw the security guard again, standing against the wall. It seemed as if ages had passed.

I nodded to the plainclothesman.

"Yes, thank you," I said, with a slight slur.

He took my briefcase and helped me up. He held me by the arm and then put a supporting arm around my waist.

"Steady, now."

My companion sat beside me on the plane, reading a morning paper.

A headline stated: *Queen Starts Maritime Visit Today*. The Queen had come for a visit to North America to participate in the Bicentennial celebrations of the United States and to open the Olympic Games in Montreal. En route from the States to Montreal she was to visit Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. She would be arriving in Halifax that day, and stay in Fredericton the Thursday and Friday. The Games were to be opened on that Saturday. And somewhere in Montreal, teeming with tens of thousands of visitors to the Games, would be my assignment.

We were flying above the clouds, the sunlight glinting brightly off the airplane's wing.

They served us food, but I indicated that I did not want to eat.

### I FELL INTO A SERIES OF MOROSE RECOLLECTIONS.

As a student in South Africa, rebellious towards the authorities there, I became involved with some mildly revolutionary activities. We blew up a railway line, damaged a transformer station, and helped to smuggle some explosives to a group in Rhodesia. I got caught. There was a trial, and I was sent first to that prison and then to a special training camp.

I emerged an expert saboteur and killer, and one who was considered psychic at that. I was given the name Penkop. Although I took active part in raids, I was also used, and used more and more frequently, to ferret out untrustworthy elements and to act as advisor on major excursions.

But there was another element to my personality. Although outwardly a patriotic fighter, the truth was that I had turned into a mercenary. I would be utterly sincere in giving my services to whoever would pay most. It was simply circumstances that kept me fighting for the South Africans.

We were sent on special excursions into Rhodesia and, later, Portuguese East Africa.

After a particularly successful raid I was back in South Africa, enjoying a holiday in Johannesburg, when in a park a black man struck up a conversation with me. I could still see that park bench we sat on and the splashing fountain nearby. He said that he knew who I was and that somebody across the border in Portuguese East Africa was interested in meeting me. He mentioned a substantial amount of money.

"What does he want of me?"

"You would assist in the training of a small unit, and the general wants you to provide him with some information."

I indicated that I was interested and a few more meetings followed. The money did not come cheaply. I had to communicate to them the

details of our next raid, since that was the way they wanted me to enter the country. We landed by helicopter, and as I and thee of my comrades were running—in four directions—towards the cover of bushes and thorn trees, I heard the machine guns open fire. They got three of us alive and they got the helicopter. I did not see any of my surviving comrades again, either. I was taken away in an old van, lying tied up in the back, bouncing over the rough roads.

Traveling through half the night, they took me to a place where there were a few low buildings. The next day, in a little room, I met the guerilla leader whom they called their general. We discussed arrangements and I started training the men. But one afternoon, while conversing with the general, I saw, plainly written on his face, his intention to have me killed soon.

That same night I got up. Although it took me most of two hours, I managed to kill the pair of guards posted outside my hut and the single guards that were stationed in the vicinity of his sleeping quarters. I slit his throat while he was asleep; his eyes turned up white. Once, as a child, I had caught a sparrow in our backyard, and killed it by wringing its neck. In after years that incident caused greater anguish in my soul than almost anything I had ever done. It seemed to me that I was guilty of a much greater crime in killing that sparrow than in killing a man. Its eyes also glazed over white.

I disappeared into the night, into the *veld*, and over a period of some weeks worked my way back to my base in South Africa. I could then tell my superiors about our ill-fated raid and about my subsequent action.

“Well done, Penkop. You deserve a medal.”

I might have been deserving of a medal, but not of a promotion, which was what I got. In any case, I decided to call it quits. I had been active for a number of years and wanted a chance to continue with my studies. When they saw that I had made up my mind, they did not put any obstacles in my way, and I returned to civilian life. I visited Canada on a scholarship and stayed on.

IN THE PLANE, MY COMPANION WAS TALKING TO ME:  
“Would you like some orange juice?”

I took a little sip and then another. It was delicious.

“Where will you be staying in Montreal?” he asked casually.

I paused a moment. “I’m not quite out of it yet,” I said softly.

He respected that and sat back.

A question that had been bothering me all along became prominent: why the drug? Was I to be especially psyched up? Or was there perhaps

a third party whose interest was to derail the mission? I reviewed the events at the airport. The Indian's psyche was prominent but quite neutrally oriented towards me. The collective psyche, too, was neutral. Nothing there. So in whose interest would it be if I was conspicuously seen to be in a state of impairment? Well, it was the man who brought me my ticket, who was also responsible for administering the debilitating substance, was it not? I let my mind run through our meeting and I saw him stoop slightly at the counter while taking the cups of coffee. Something in his stoop registered right. Yes, that would be it. So why would he do a thing like that? Why would it be necessary to do that? It occurred to me that it could possibly be intended that people should be able to recall that morning and remember me. Hence, also, the presence of the Indian. It would enable people to identify me. Ah, I was getting places.

I presented the options blankly to my inner mind. After a while, it returned a verdict: the drug was given partly as a tool to strengthen my commitment to the Penkop psyche and partly as a safety factor. If something should go wrong—or even right, who knows?—I could more easily be discredited as unstable or deranged if I had been observed by a number of people to be in that state. I felt relief, for I knew I had come to the bottom of what my “friends” intended.

It was typical of the state of mind alteration, that like the vertebrae of a long snake, one complex of thoughts would round itself off and be logically followed by another. My conclusions thus led to a new round of questions. The fact that it was deemed necessary to have the precaution of a safety factor, and the need for bonding, indicated that the mission was of more than usual importance. There was a fluttering in my head. From the headlines of the paper that my companion had been reading, there drifted names: *the Olympic Games, the Queen* . . . And those were followed by other names: *Munich, the FLQ* . . . Then a host of shadows rose up, groping their way towards my consciousness and clamoring for attention.

But I decided that the time had come to shift into neutral.

I also started to feel much more my normal self.

The captain announced that we would be landing soon.

I smiled at my companion.

“How are you feeling now, sir?” he asked.

“Much better,” I said.

When I looked through the window, there below, like the shell of a marvelous sea urchin, shone the dome of the Olympic Stadium.

IN THE AIRPORT TERMINAL, I WAS IMMEDIATELY STRUCK

by the tightness of the security. Soldiers in green fatigues stood guard with automatic weapons, and police dogs and armed Mounties were in evidence. But that did not dampen the holiday mood. There was an undertone of excitement and gaiety.

Outside, a helicopter droned overhead.

I said good-bye to my companion in the luggage retrieval area. I assured him that I could proceed unaided and thanked him for his services.

On the taxi ride into town I sat back with my mind quietly in neutral, and looked out at the shifting scenery. The streets were decorated with pennants. Practically every lamppost carried an Olympic flower bunting, and numerous banners displayed the five ring symbol of the Olympic Games. We entered the cluster of skyscrapers downtown, at the foot of the low mountain from which the city got its name. I noticed only a few residents of the Olympic Village, recognizable by the large identification tags they wore on strings around their necks. I assumed that most of them simply preferred to stay inside the Village. Then, of course, only athletes from countries ranked low enough on the security scale would be given passes to leave the Village and go shopping.

The traffic became very heavy. In one tie-up, when we slowed down to a stop, an entire four lanes of stationary cars started to honk their horns. The taxi driver reminded me that it was a time-honored Montreal custom as he happily and furiously joined in the action. Three figures dressed up as clowns and monsters emerged from a mall entrance and wended their way across to the other side of the street. As they passed our taxi, one of them tapped on the car window, bent close, and made a very queer face.

We finally arrived at the hotel.

There, too, security was strict. Metal detection devices had been set up at the entrances like at an airport, and people were frisked.

At the desk I told the clerk that I had a room reservation.

"Name, please?"

"Johnny Hardy."

He referred to a registration list and then produced my room key, looking at me, while he signaled to a bellboy:

"Room 823," he said.

MY ROOM WAS SMALL BUT COMFORTABLE. I RESTED FOR an hour and then went out for a smoked meat sandwich nearby. That was one of the treats I allowed myself when visiting Montreal. After the meal, I drifted along with the crowd and wandered slowly and leisurely down the streets and in and out of stores until, at about ten to three, I

entered the bus terminal. It did not take me long to locate the right locker area and the locker itself.

I inserted the key and opened it.

Inside was a small suitcase and a note stating that I should proceed to a washroom and open the suitcase after I had locked myself into a toilet.

I did so.

The first item in the suitcase was a light summer jacket, which I carefully hung on the hook on the back of the toilet door. Then there were a small-size tape recorder with headset and a small case containing six cassette tapes. The tapes appeared to be commercial recordings of music and popular songs. There was no gun. The remaining items were a brown envelope with typed sheets in it, two ID cards, one of which identified me as a member of a unit called Alpha Tactics, and a small pillbox containing two tiny vials and strips of Band-Aid.

I started reading the sheets.

On the first sheet I was instructed to memorize the contents of the sheets and then to wash them down the toilet. The second sheet contained the information that interested me most: the outline of my mission. The International Olympic Committee, the hub of organization for the Games, was holding a series of meetings at a nearby hotel. At a business meeting of their General Assembly, scheduled for the afternoon of the following day, it was expected that an attempt would be made on the life of Mr. \_\_\_\_\_, a prominent member of the Committee. If successful, the attempt would cast a pall over the entire Games. My mission was to help detect and, if necessary, kill the would-be assailant. Background and further information would be found on one of the tapes.

The third sheet contained the description of a weapon: a tiny, wooden syringe, hidden in a seam of the jacket. Before use, it had to be transferred to the palm of the hand and taped into position, with the needle resting between two fingers. It was operated by applying pressure from the fleshy part of the palm at the base of the thumb. There was a note to the effect that the two vials provided had differently colored caps, pink and black, and that the black one was to be used during the mission. The poison would simulate the symptoms of a heart attack.

The last sheet contained a list of more immediate instructions. I was to put the jacket on and carry the contents of the pillbox loose in the pockets. I had to return straight to the hotel from there and start to familiarize myself with the transfer and working of the syringe, using the pink-capped vial. At eight o'clock that evening I had to start lis-

tening to the tape labeled *Nocturne*. The other five tapes were not to be used.

I sighed.

I took off my own jacket, placed it in the suitcase with the set of tapes and the tape recorder, and then put on the new jacket. It fitted me very well. I emptied the pillbox contents into the pockets. I removed the typed sheets from the toilet tank, dropped them into the bowl, and flushed them down. I picked up the suitcase.

As I was passing through the washbasin area, dropping the empty pillbox and the brown envelope into a waste paper container, I accidentally caught a glimpse of myself moving in the mirror, appearing like a stranger in the new jacket, and looking very grim. Intuitively, I stopped. That grimness would not do at all. I proceeded to wash my face and hands in a very leisurely fashion. No movement was to be rushed. I made some remark to the person next to me and he replied in a joking way, and we both laughed. With the tension draining away, I picked my suitcase up again, straightened, and smiled at my image in the mirror.

It was Penkop I saw there, looking back at me.

AS SOON AS I GOT BACK TO MY ROOM, I STARTED TO RE-hearse the routine with the syringe. Very cunningly hid in a seam inside the jacket, it was easy to release by pulling a thread. Two tiny cylinders made of a stiff type of wood like bamboo contained a needle of much harder type wood, very thin, with an almost invisible hole running through its length. The components fitted together neatly and the whole contraption operated smoothly. It was a product of consummate craftsmanship.

At intervals during the evening I heard carnival type noises drift up from the street below. Once, I moved to the window and looked out. A float was passing by, and on it a band played West Indian music. On the sidewalk, people were dancing.

At eight o'clock I placed the tape labeled *Nocturne* into the tape recorder, lay down on my back on the bed, and turned my mind into receptive mode.

A male voice started to talk quietly, informatively and neutrally, explaining some of the political tensions surrounding the meetings of the IOC.

The IOC was confronted with two main issues:

First, there was the Taiwan issue. Taiwan wanted to compete under the name "Republic of China." The U.S., in its warming relations with mainland China, was opposed to that. The IOC, led by its President, at



first supported Taiwan's cause and then backed down. Canada, the host country, also stiffened in its opposition to Taiwan, and refused to grant visas to the Taiwanese athletes unless Taiwan was prepared to accept a compromise. Taiwan refused any compromise and was preparing to withdraw from the Games. Their formal withdrawal would be made at the IOC meeting that Wednesday afternoon.

Then there was the New Zealand issue. New Zealand had sent a rugby team to tour South Africa and had thereby displeased the black African countries. The Organization for African Unity wanted New Zealand kicked out, like Rhodesia and South Africa before, else they would boycott the Games. Tanzania had already withdrawn and a lengthening list of black African countries were preparing to withdraw. That matter, too, would be discussed at the IOC's business meeting the next day.

The voice on the tape continued to say that it appeared a virtual certainty that Taiwan would withdraw, that New Zealand would be allowed to remain, and that, consequently, a number of black African countries would walk out. These various anticipated outcomes mutually reinforced the impression that the IOC exhibited a bias favoring the capitalist world and presenting a slap in the face of African consciousness. This imagined bias, whether justified or not, deeply angered black African countries, especially those in the Russian sphere of influence. Angola and Uganda were two especially sensitive spots. Angola had Russian advisors in their country and Cuban soldiers fighting in the bush. The previous Sunday an American mercenary had been executed there. Uganda was a country still smarting under the humiliation of the Israeli raid on Entebbe. Intelligence had it that an attempt would be made on the life of Mr. \_\_\_\_\_, at the first business meeting at which the two main issues were to be formally brought forward. That was the meeting scheduled for the next afternoon. The assailant could therefore possibly be coming from a black African country in which the Russian influence was strong, and it would be my mission to help detect and, if necessary, kill the assailant.

The tape continued to give possible profiles of assailants and to discuss various methods of attack and techniques of foiling them.

Near the end of the tape, the voice stated that I should wait thirty minutes and then play the tape again. It also gave some instructions for the next morning. The tape contents were to be erased at eight o'clock. Immediately after, I was to take a rest, and at 11:15 I could expect to receive two visitors, who would accompany me to the hotel where the IOC meeting was to take place.

I spent the next thirty minutes mulling over the information and the

instructions.

It was during the first replay of the tape that I detected the sounds indicating the presence of subliminal material.

### THAT NIGHT I HAD VERY LITTLE SLEEP.

One reason, certainly, was the amount of noise that went on until deep into the night, both outside on the streets and inside the hotel, where late night parties were in progress. The main factor, however, was the necessity of listening to the tape. Each time I played it, I encountered the instruction near the end that I should wait thirty minutes and then restart it. Consequently, I played the tape over and over, with only the half hour breaks between, throughout the entire night. When I neglected to do that, there would be some noise, usually a thumping sound on the wall, but on one occasion the ringing of my room telephone, that would wake me and cause me to reactivate the tape. Thus I was reassured, if indeed I needed a reminder, that my "friends" were around.

But the factor that prevented me from even sleeping in the half-hour breaks, was the need to fathom the subliminal message on the tape. I kept focusing upon its evolving effect on me in order to try and determine its nature. The crucial part was something that soaked in deeply and that called forth the inner stuff that constituted the very essence of Penkop's being: that inner stuff of indomitable resolve, as solid as steel, that reached into a high place where there was singing. But it also stirred troubled waters beneath and I was bothered by it. It seemed evident to me that the tape contained a subliminally enforced directive for a killing. In the course of the night I felt how that center of resolve in my psyche continued to gather substance to itself, and that confirmed the conclusion: I was being instructed to kill.

I must have dozed off, some time in the early hours of the morning, while listening to the first part of the tape. I saw the face of Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ rise up in front of me, with his mouth open. He was screaming silently and I tried to push the needle into his mouth and get him to shut up. It was terrifying. I sat upright, with cold sweat breaking out on my face, and stared wildly into the soft semidarkness around me in the room. Oh God, what a nightmare. And then like a bomb, the thought hit me: was I to be the actual assailant . . . ? Was that the subliminal message I had been searching for . . . ?

*Oh, my God . . .*

Stunned, and disoriented by the lack of sleep, I could believe anything possible to believe.

I got up from the bed, walked over the window and looked out. The

city was deserted, and the buildings stood white and silent in the moonlight. It was a world curled up in its shell, sleeping.

"Oh God, let it not be true . . .," I whispered to myself.

A very light tapping sounded on the wall. I turned slowly away from the window and returned to my place at the tape recorder.

DURING THE REMAINDER OF THE SESSIONS, I CAREFULLY reviewed my reaction. My natural voice told me that if I were to be the assailant, then my preparation for the event would have been somewhat different. Thus, an attempt would have been made to generate in my psyche a feeling of antipathy towards Mr. \_\_\_\_\_, and that was not the case. Examining myself, I could find only a good portion of human warmth and some sympathy towards the man, no antipathy. I asked myself why a person from South Africa would be chosen as the killer. Something in that idea was trying to make better sense and to detach itself in the shape of a rational thought. I let it sink towards the inner levels of my mind. I seemed to enter a brief state of calm, waiting. Then there drifted up the soft and beautiful conclusion: "Consider the countries and people you are associated with . . . It is not in their best interest to have that killing take place . . ."

That was the answer.

A feeling of relief flooded my being and then, if only for a brief period, I just drifted into wonderful sleep, like a baby . . .

It was on that occasion that my room telephone started to ring. I fumbled around for it, but when I lifted it from the hook, I heard only a neutral buzzing sound. Automatically, I flipped the tape and restarted it.

Outside, the dawn was breaking.

I WAS AWAKENED BY THE NOISE OF A CHAMBERMAID handling her cart in the corridor.

It was 7:30.

I got up, took a shower, and shaved.

At eight o'clock I pressed the Play and Record buttons on the tape recorder: the only way I knew of erasing the tape contents. It would take a half-hour for the one side and a half-hour for the other.

While that was in progress, I went through the syringe routine again, and then produced the black-capped vial and filled the syringe from it. The cap of the vial also served as a cap for the needle. In fact, once in place, it was not necessary to remove it. When the operating squeeze was applied, the needle would pierce the cap. The cap thus also served as some protection against self-injection. I then carefully replaced the

syringe into its hidden pocket in the jacket. It was in its triggered position but it was made to be stable in that position. I hung the jacket in the closet.

I used my razor to give myself a slight cut on my left palm, just below the forefinger. I rinsed and dried the area, and covered it with a strip of Band-Aid, leaving one end just slightly attached.

As soon as I had started the erasure of the second side of the tape, I set my travel alarm clock for 9:45 and slept dreamlessly for an hour. When I awoke I sat in meditation: an integral part of my discipline. I reached deep down into the inner recesses of my being. Finally, after a period of restlessness of body and mind, my being cleared quietly and completely. It was the tale told of the lotus: its stem rising through muddy water, its flower opening above the surface.

I got up and lazily stretched myself. My machine was humming and everything around me was in place. In perfect control of myself, down to the finest degree, I was singing my song . . .

#### IT WAS TWENTY FIVE TO ELEVEN.

I realized that I had had nothing to eat for almost twenty-four hours. I rang down to Room Service for an order of toast and orange juice, and proceeded to clean the room up a bit. The breakfast arrived and I ate like a king.

There was a light knock on the door. A man and a young but mature looking woman stood there.

"Come on in," I said.

"This is Kathy," the man said. "And I'm Dave. Dave Steeples."

"I have been expecting you. Please sit down."

"I assume that you've been doing your homework," Dave said.

I nodded. "Yes."

He proceeded to fill me in on the arrangements. They would accompany me to the hotel where the IOC meeting was to be held, and stay with me during the meeting. My main assignment was to point the would-be assailant out to them, as soon as I could detect him. Also, I was to address myself exclusively to Kathy and ignore the presence of Dave, as if he were not a member of our party. Dave said with some emphasis that if I should have problems with Security at any point, I was to use the code words: *Check Penkop A-1*.

That was all there was to it.

WE LEFT OUR HOTEL AT 11:45 AND WERE DRIVEN DOWN TO the other hotel, where we arrived twenty minutes later.

The security was extraordinary. Not only did they use the metal-

detecting devices and the same frisking and identification procedures as at my hotel, but, in addition, a German shepherd to sniff in people's bags. After we had passed a certain point, they escorted us to dressing rooms where we had to strip and allow our persons and clothing to be examined for concealed weapons and substances. On the intercom they apologized for the inconvenience, but explained that there were extraordinary circumstances and nobody could be spared the ordeal. A person did have the choice of leaving the premises without having to undergo the examination.

When I was dressed again, and Dave and I were waiting to join Kathy, I surreptitiously slipped my hand in under the jacket, feeling for the syringe.

It was there.

*They missed it*, I thought. My natural voice replied: "Or they let it through."

On our way to the convention hall, we passed through one more checkpoint, where I had to produce my special ID.

"IOC Security. Your business?"

"Alpha Weapons and Tactics."

"All right. You may proceed."

THE CONVENTION HALL WAS ALREADY FILLING UP WHEN we got there. It was a large hall and there were clearly many more people than just the seventy-odd members of the IOC, as I had naively thought. Seated in delegations, with name plates and microphones on the desks, they represented a fascinating mosaic of nations brought together in the name of amateur sport. But the atmosphere was strained and businesslike. Behind the scenes there had probably been frantic all day long attempts at compromise and reconciliation.

Before we entered, I had asked permission to take a writing pad and a pen with me, provided by the hotel. Kathy had no objection. My idea was to use the writing pad as a shield while transferring the syringe. As it turned out, there would be no opportunity for such a leisurely transfer.

We went to take our preassigned seats. Dave was sitting next to the aisle, then me, then Kathy.

The hall was almost filled up.

I let my eyes wander over the people—some talking in small groups, many simply sitting quietly, and others filing into their places. I saw somebody in the British delegation that I had met years before, and smiled at him briefly, before continuing my scrutiny. I gave special attention to the African delegations. Many of the countries they repre-

sented were in a state of rapid change, and I imagined some of that turmoil reflected in their delegations. Nigeria had been particularly active in mobilizing African opinion on the subject of the expulsion of New Zealand from the Games. Their delegates were involved in animated discussion. Other members appeared tired. I caught a look of sadness on the face of a representative from Kenya. With their long-legged runners trained in the clear air of the African highlands and already in the Olympic Village, what agony must they and their Ethiopian neighbors be going through trying to weigh what was more important: Olympic gold or African unity?

The figure of a man standing half turned away from me, amiably talking to somebody in the row in front of him, caught my attention. Something in the set of his shoulders was familiar. I moved a little so that I could see his profile.

I turned as cold as ice.

For he was the black man who, many years before, had approached me in Johannesburg on behalf of the guerilla general. Mozambique had gained her independence from Portugal the previous year and he must be representing his country.

My first impulse was to hide and I felt a bit sick.

Then, very gently, there floated up from my inner mind the subliminal message on the tape.

It said: "Kill the black man."

Almost poetically, like the closing of a butterfly's wings, a companion message floated in to join the first.

It said: "Kill Kingwezi."

That was his name: Kingwezi.

I had found my target.

## BUT HE WAS NOT THE ASSAILANT

My psychic sense had become extraordinarily acute and functioned independently of the preoccupation of the moment. Some rows to the front and to our left, sitting next to the aisle, was a yellowish man with a bad spot on his crown. He sat turned into himself, his body resembling a coat thrown loosely over a cross. He looked like a military man. His aura was of one crucified within himself, ready to commit a last desperate act. In the space above his head, as it were, I saw that he would not leave the hall alive.

"Is anything the matter?" I heard Kathy ask at my side.

I swallowed. "I have found our man," I said.

I looked straight in his direction, but I had momentary difficulty focusing my eyes properly. There were two men: one yellowish, one

black.

"Who is it?" I heard Kathy ask.

In the front of the hall, the members of the IOC Executive had all arrived and it seemed that the President was about to open the meeting.

I leaned slightly forward. "That man, next to the aisle, over there . . . See . . . the yellowish man with the bald spot."

I saw the man's face muscles work. Was he chewing gum?

"He's got something in his mouth," I said, and continued urgently: "The attack is imminent."

I realized that Dave was talking into a walkie-talkie.

At that moment, from the back of the hall, there was a sound like a shot. A *gun*, I thought. *Impossible*. My natural voice replied that it was simulated.

People started to shout and a commotion developed. I noticed the yellowish man get up and go forward. What was happening in the back of the hall was clearly intended as a diversion.

"He's on his way," I said urgently.

Everything appeared to turn into slow motion. People were slowly rising up from their seats and slowly turning to look back at where the disturbance was taking place.

From deep within me I let the coil of vital current rise. I let it rise through the successive centers. It took but a moment. My being straightened. It was as if it caught the sun and it glinted, like a sword.

Against the backdrop of blurred figures in slow motion, like within the interstices of a lattice, a few individuals appeared to move at seemingly normal speeds. One was the yellowish man with the bald spot, who was moving smoothly and generally unobserved in the direction of Mr. \_\_\_\_\_. One was my companion, Dave. In his headlong forward motion he also had his arm extended like a general on the battlefield, indicating the assailant to security men stationed near the front of the hall.

And one was me. I decided that the general state of commotion provided the best opportunity I was likely to get to complete the second half of my mission. In the running, I released the syringe from the inside of my jacket and slipped it into my left palm, taping it down.

It appeared that someone out front had managed to strike the yellow man from behind, knocking him down, a scant few yards away from Mr. \_\_\_\_\_. Dave was just getting to the scene. Around us, most of the slowly moving figures were still looking to the back, some were actually still getting up from their seats, and only some were aware of the happenings up front.

Mr. \_\_\_\_\_, pale and shaken, surrounded by

security men, was in the process of being escorted from the hall.

They rolled the yellowish man, lying prone on the floor, onto his back. Ridiculously, a small peashooter dropped from his mouth and rolled onto the floor. He was dead, blue areas forming on his face. Apparently, in his fall, or when he was struck, he fell victim to the poison he was carrying.

I moved on to where the black man was standing.

LATER, I COULD RECALL THE NEXT FEW SECONDS AS ONLY a succession of still frames. His face, registering recognition and incredulity. His face, with a glint of fear. The beginning of a smile. In the last frame, I was next to him.

"Hallo, friend," he said.

People shoved around us and as if for self-protection I placed my hand lightly on his nearest shoulder.

"Long time, no see," I said.

He must have seen something in my eyes. "You did me a great favor, you know. I always wanted to meet you again to tell you that," he whispered.

I was not sure I heard right. "What did you say?"

There was shouting, and some cries of shock, as more people around us started to absorb what had been happening.

"That general was a very cruel man," he replied. "You did us all a service, my friend."

I looked straight into his eyes and saw that he was speaking the truth. Like a surging ocean, I felt our beings break through obstacles and flow into one another, with a swirling motion. I knew that a change had come over him since I saw him last. He was as solid as rock, and he was my equal. From inside of him, like from a mirror, I saw myself looking back.

I slowly lowered my arm to my side.

I don't know if he then actually said the next words or if I just imagined afterwards that he had said then: "Watch me go. In not too many years, we will be friends."

He was still talking to me, when I felt somebody take me by the elbow and talk into my ear:

"RCMP. Will you come with us, please."

They took me to a little side-room, where they found the syringe on me and removed it. They wanted to know why I had the weapon.

"It's O.K. You may check Penkop A 1," I said.

One of them left and returned after a while. I heard him say to the others that a certain lieutenant was on his way.



"We would still want to know why you had the weapon."

"For self-protection," I answered.

When the lieutenant arrived, there was a brief discussion.

The lieutenant then took me to one side. "Why have you not completed your mission?" he asked. He had a South African accent.

"Because my intuition told me not to," I answered. "That man is not against us."

"Why would your intuition tell you that?"

"Well," I said, "when I looked into his eyes, I realized that we were equal."

He paused. "As for the main mission," he continued. "You have done very well."

He looked at me with just the barest suggestion of a smile. "You will be hearing from us."

THAT EVENING, EVEN THOUGH ALL OF LOVELY MON-treal was there to be enjoyed, I just headed back to my hotel room and my bed, and slept.

The next morning, to my pleasant surprise, Dave and Kathy appeared at the door. They had arranged to drive me to the airport.

On the way, Dave told me that he had been doing some research on the assailant. He was born in China and left the country as a young soldier in 1949, when the Communists took over. He lived in Taiwan for a few years, then moved to the States. He was known to have taken part in demonstrations against Presidents Nixon's and Ford's overtures to the regime in Mainland China.

When we got to the airport, we had only a few minutes to say good-bye.

"Hope you have a nice trip back," said Dave.

"How long a flight is it?" Kathy asked.

"Just about an hour. But I lose an hour. We're on Atlantic time, you know."

THE FRIENDLY STEWARDESS ON THE PLANE HANDED ME A morning paper. It showed pictures of the Queen in Nova Scotia. I started to read but after a few minutes I put the paper down. I was still too deeply bothered by certain aspects of the second half of my mission: the Kingwezi assignment.

It seemed to me that it could be no mere coincidence that I was supposed to kill the man who lured me into the betrayal of our unit so many years ago. Bothersome questions remained. Why was one major assignment tacked on to another? The one could only interfere with the

other. Why was the killing of Kingwezi to be done at that very closely watched meeting? Surely, with security as tight as it was, nobody could be expected to get away with it?

The real reason finally dawned on me.

There could be only one possible explanation. They must have found out about my readiness to sell my services. They had then proceeded to devise a plan that would settle the score with both Kingwezi and myself. The intention, very obviously, was that I should kill Kingwezi and get caught—then, presumably, brought to justice and undergo the appropriate punishment.

I sat back, assimilating that sobering knowledge. *Well, I fooled them*, I thought, and could not prevent a smile from spreading across my face. By not killing a man, I had saved myself. And if they were out to get me, they would have to try again.

I started to relax, for the first time since leaving Fredericton, two days before. I momentarily closed my eyes. Suddenly, I was a child again, in a sun-warmed backyard, holding the pulsing body of a sparrow in my hand. I lifted my arm and released it, and it flew away with a chirp . . . At the same time, I experienced the loosening of something that had been rolled up very tightly in my being, for a very long time . . . In later years I would remember this as the exact moment when I had finally stopped being a mercenary.

I opened my eyes and looked out.

We were very close to the end of our journey. We had descended below the cloud cover, and there, a silver snake in the woods, was the St. John River. After awhile it widened into the headpond above Mactaquac Dam, a few sailboats on it . . .

WHEN WE ARRIVED AT FREDERICTON AIRPORT, A LARGE crowd was waiting there.

As I entered the lobby, I saw the man who had seen me off two days before: Neville, the tall, friendly man with the moustache. Beside him was the young Indian.

I walked over to them and grinned broadly. "I hope you're not about to buy me another coffee," I said, with a wink at the Indian.

They both laughed.

"No," Neville answered. "We have other duties. Getting ready for the Queen, you know. Her plane is due in thirty minutes."

"You don't say," I answered. "I thought the people were here to meet *me*."

*Cody's assignment seemed easy at first. Then some strongarms stepped in to make life difficult!*

# The Elephant's Graveyard

by JAMES M. REASONER

THE ROOM WAS EVERYTHING YOU'D EXPECT FROM A shabby hotel in a small Mexican town, but it was on the second floor and commanded a view of the old abandoned church at the other end of town. That was all I cared about.

I had arrived late the night before and hadn't slept much in the lumpy bed. I was up before the sun, reversing the one chair in the room and sitting in front of the window. A pair of binoculars hung around my neck, but I wasn't going to use them until I had to. Nothing wears your eyes out faster than staring through binoculars for a while.

The town slowly came to life in front of me. The little shops that lined the street opened their doors for business. A few cars, most of them ancient, rolled along the cobblestones. It was the kind of place where you expected to see burros and serapes and Fred C. Dobbs. The poverty here was the desperate kind, and it was hard to believe that a few miles away, on the coast, were large estates with massive villas where the rich lived.

A few Americans made their way through the streets, some of them easy to spot, others not so easy. But I would know the one I was looking for when I saw him. I had a photograph of him to go by, and I had his sister's description.

"Luther was always tall," Evelyn Kellman had told me. "Even as a child. But he was awkward, like you'd expect. You look for a tall man down there in Mexico, Mr. Cody, and that will be my brother."

I was glad I had the photo. It showed a young man in jeans and a sweater, standing next to a car, and he was tall, all right. And thin, not more than a hundred and sixty pounds, I'd guess. His hair was light

brown and tended to be a little wild, and his face had a gaunt, hollow-cheeked look so that you'd never suspect he came from one of the richest families in the state. His name was Luther Kellman, and he had come to Mexico on a vacation from college in 1967. He hadn't been home since.

"Sixteen years is a long time," I'd told his sister. "It won't be easy to find him."

"But I know where he is. One of my friends saw him when she was down there on a holiday last month. I just need someone to go get him."

"And what if he doesn't want to come back? I'd assume that's a strong possibility under the circumstances."

Evelyn Kellman had handed me a check. "Convince him, Mr. Cody."

It went against my principles. I needed the money, though, and I had been hoping ever since I left Fort Worth that I could find some way around the problem.

Maybe he'll *want* to come home, I told myself. Maybe he's just forgotten where it is.

Evelyn Kellman's friend had been on a sight-seeing jaunt from Puerto Vallarta when she spotted Luther. I had flown in to the city, rented a car, and driven up to this village in the hills. Village wasn't really the right word; it was a little bigger than that, but not much. I had asked the clerk downstairs if he knew Luther Kellman, and the smile on the man's face told me more than his words did. He knew Luther, all right, and as he explained that Luther had taken to staying in the abandoned church, I could tell that he thought it was funny.

A lot of Americans had wound up in Mexico during the Sixties, searching for themselves or for some false image of a simpler life. To the natives, Luther Kellman was evidently one of those lost souls who never quite got over the realization that Mexico in the Sixties wasn't Paris in the Twenties.

Hell, Paris in the Twenties probably wasn't Paris in the Twenties.

ALL OF WHICH JUST LEFT ME WITH AN UNPLEASANT JOB to do. I could have gone to the church and confronted Luther and told him that his sister wanted him to come home. Instead I was sitting and watching, waiting uncomfortably for my first look at him.

The hotel wasn't air-conditioned; that would have been too much to hope for. So the window had to be left open against the heat, strong even this early in the day, and that meant flies came in and buzzed around my head. I brushed them away and watched the church.

It was adobe, like many of the other buildings in town, and might have been there for over a hundred years for all I knew. Wooden doors sagged on their hinges, and there was no bell in the open-sided tower that rose above the front of the building. Some of the stained-glass windows down the sides were intact, but many of them had been broken out. I hadn't asked the clerk why it was no longer in use. There was another church, bigger and newer, just outside of town, and that was probably the answer.

Luther came out just after eight o'clock. He wore a white shirt and gray pants. I lifted the binoculars and focused on him to be sure, and that same gaunt face leaped out at me. He hadn't changed much over the years. His hair was thinner and wilder now, and as he rubbed his eyes and squinted against the early morning glare, I saw a weariness in him that hadn't been apparent in the picture. His feet were large and bare.

Beside me on the floor was the camera with the telephoto lens. I picked it up and located him in the viewfinder. The lens worked almost as well as the binoculars. I snapped off several frames of film, then put the camera down.

Luther wandered up the street, not speaking to anyone that I saw, and turned off into a cafe. There was no point in postponing it any longer. I locked the camera into my suitcase, knowing that someone could steal the suitcase just as easily, shoved it under the bed, and went downstairs.

The interior of the cafe was dark and cool after the glare of the street. I went through the arched doorway and almost stumbled on the shallow step down that was just inside. After a pause to let my eyes adjust, I spotted Luther sitting at a table in one corner.

The place wasn't big, and the small floor space was taken up by rough wooden tables. Most of them were empty. There were six people in the cafe besides Luther, and one of them was an old woman who served as the waitress.

I SETTLED DOWN AT A TABLE AFTER MAKING SURE THAT it was within easy earshot of Luther. When the old woman shuffled over to me and gave me questioning look, I spoke in English. "Cup of coffee, please," I said, "and whatever you've got to eat that's good."

She gave no indication whether or not she understood me other than turning away and moving slowly toward a swinging door that opened into the kitchen.

I looked around the room, keeping my face open and innocent. Luther was drinking coffee out of a heavy mug and eating some sort of

mush out of a bowl. I took that in without spending any more time on him than I did on any of the others.

Then I let my gaze slip back to him. He was the only other American in the cafe, and that gave me my opening.

I looked at him until he glanced up, then nodded and smiled. "Hi," I said. "From the States, aren't you, buddy?"

"Yes."

"Down here on vacation? That's what I'm doing. Trying to soak up a little local color, you know?"

"I live here."

His voice was deep and slow and a little distorted by the mush he kept eating. He had no real interest in talking to me, but he didn't seem suspicious, either.

"You live here? How about that. Must be a lot different than living in the States. Where you from, buddy?"

He didn't answer for a long moment, just sat there spooning food into his mouth. Then: "Texas."

So he did remember where home was.

The old woman brought me a mug of coffee and a bowl of the same mush. I nodded my thanks to her, sampled the strong coffee, and gave the stuff in the bowl a dubious look. Rather than dig in just yet, I stood up, moved over beside Luther's table, and stuck out my hand. "Fellow Texan, eh? Glad to meet you." I told him my name, knowing that he wouldn't recognize it.

He looked at my hand for a few seconds, put his spoon down, shook quickly. I pulled back one of the other chairs at his table and sat down. He didn't like it, but he didn't say anything.

"You don't mind if I join you, do you?" I said quickly. My coffee and mush were still back at my table, but I didn't care. "What's your name, pal? Been down here long?"

"Sixteen years." He ignored the first question.

I lifted one eyebrow. "That's a long time. You must really like it, huh?"

"It's all right."

I leaned forward and rested my forearms on the table. Giving my voice a confidential tone, I said: "In all that time, didn't you ever want to go home?"

He shook his head, and for the first time, I saw a spark of something in his eyes. "This is home now," he said. "There's nothing for me back in Texas."

Nothing but a share in a good-sized fortune, I thought. Evelyn Kellman had made no secret of the fact that her family was rich. Why

she wanted Luther to come home now was something I didn't know. Maybe she missed him.

"I'd sure get homesick if I was you," I said. He had ruined my hoped-for scenario. That would have found him more than willing to go back to Fort Worth. That would have solved my problem. A moral dilemma was something I really didn't need.

"I like it here." There was a note of finality in that slow voice, as if he was officially bringing the conversation to a close. He didn't want to talk to a fellow countryman, and he certainly didn't want to talk about going home.

I was debating what approach to try next when something momentarily blocked off the sunlight coming through the open door. The shadow moved on, and I looked up to see what had caused it. Two men had entered the cafe, and now they were walking toward the table where Luther and I sat.

"Hello, Luther," one of them said as they walked up. His eyes touched me. "Who's your friend?"

I'VE BEEN SHOT A FEW TIMES, AND AFTER THE INITIAL IMPACT, the main thing I always felt was a kind of cold numbness that centered somewhere deep inside me. I felt the same kind of thing when this newcomer looked at me, without the shock of a bullet.

"My name's Cody," I said quickly, standing up with a smile plastered on my face. "Damn, this is my lucky day! You boys are Americans, too, aren't you? I figured I was all alone down here in this Godforsaken country—"

"Then you just met our friend Luther." The words were flat, emotionless.

"Just a few minutes ago. Say, why don't you join us for a little breakfast? Just let me get my coffee . . ."

I started to step around them. The man who had spoken to me was medium height, wearing a lightweight linen suit. His hair and eyes were both dark. The other one, the one who reached out lazily and grasped my arm, was taller, blond, thick in the shoulders. I didn't even try to pull away from him.

"No need for that," the first one said smoothly. "I'm afraid we won't be able to join you. We have some business to take care of. Perhaps later." He turned his attention to the table. "Luther. come on."

The blond one let go of me as Luther scraped the last of the mush from the bottom of the bowl. He swallowed the rest of his coffee and stood up. As he got to his feet, I saw him sway just slightly. Something

was wrong with him, something that I hadn't noticed before. He might have been sick, or drunk, or drugged. I couldn't tell which.

The two of them fell in step on each side of him, forming an escort as they left the cafe without looking back at me. I took a long breath and wondered what the hell I was supposed to do now.

Maybe they were killers, maybe they weren't, but one thing was sure. They were hard men, and I didn't think they would like it if they knew that I was a private detective hired to take Luther home.

They seemed to have bought my garrulous American act, though, and that gave me some breathing room. Now all I had to do was decide how I wanted to use it.

I looked around the room as I got a bill from my wallet and stepped over to my table. I left the money there and started for the door. No one looked at me. The other customers carefully kept their eyes elsewhere, and I knew what that meant. They didn't want anything to do with the two men, or with what had happened here. I had talked to the men, so they weren't even going to acknowledge my existence anymore.

THE TEMPERATURE HAD RISEN DURING MY BRIEF TIME IN the cafe. I felt sweat starting to soak into the short-sleeved cotton shirt I wore.

There was no sign of Luther or the other two men on the street, but a car was disappearing around a corner several blocks away. I didn't get a good look at it, just enough to know that it wasn't one of the ancient vehicles that the natives drove. It was a newer, shinier. A rental car, in all likelihood. I had one just like it, parked over by the hotel.

Options ran through my mind. I could let them go and try to find Luther again later. I could go back to Fort Worth and tell his sister that he wasn't coming home, even though that would mean giving her back her money. I could get in my car and follow them to wherever it was they were going.

I got in the car.

The streets in the town were cobblestone, but the road back to the coast was packed dirt. There hadn't been any rain here for a while, and it was easy to follow the dust of the other car. I stayed well back and thought about what I was doing.

I had glimpsed something pathetic in Luther Kellman, and I tried to tell myself that I was just trying to help a fellow American down on his luck. But I knew that wasn't all the answer. Part of it was plain damn curiosity. And that's one of the most dangerous things around.

The road twisted and dipped and turned through the hills, and it took



more than thirty minutes to cover the few miles to the coast. Puerta Vallarta came into view, nestled above the bay. Asphalt pavement appeared, and the telltale dust vanished. I sped up and closed the gap until I could see the other car. Two men were in the back seat. Luther and the dark man, I was willing to bet. The blond would be driving.

They led me into an expensive residential neighborhood where villas perched on cliffs above the water. I saw them turn into a driveway, and I went on past without a glance in their direction.

About a quarter of a mile further on, a stand of trees grew close to the road. I ran the car off to the side there and got out. Running back didn't take long, but I was winded when I got there. I slowed down to get my breath back and slipped through a hedge onto the grounds of the estate where they had gone.

There was a lot of yard around the villa, but luckily there were also palm trees and shrubbery all over the place. Sneaking up on the house wasn't hard. Figuring out why I was doing this was.

THE VILLA WAS VERY QUIET THIS EARLY IN THE MORNING. It was only a few minutes after nine o'clock, and most of the people who live in places like that don't get up until at least noon. I heard voices coming from somewhere and let them lead me around to the side of the house that faced the cliff. There was a huge terrace there, and five people stood arguing on the flagstones.

I crouched behind the leafiest potted plant I could find and tried to make out what they were saying. I was a good thirty yards away, though, and I didn't feel stealthy enough to try to get closer. I had a good view of the group. Luther was easy to spot, as were the dark man and the blond. The three of them were facing a man and a woman. The man wore swim trunks, the woman a one-piece suit. He was handsome and she was beautiful, and they certainly looked like they belonged there.

There were trees all around the terrace, and the shade they cast made it difficult for me to see everything. I had been watching for almost three minutes before I realized that both the dark man and the blond held guns. The little pistols were trained on the beautiful couple.

Shouts came to my ears. Angry words were exchanged on the terrace, and the man in the swim trunks took a step forward. One of the guns popped, and he stepped back. I could see how shocked he was by the fact that he had just been shot.

He went to his knees. The woman ran to him, then there was another pop and she fell. She didn't move, and the man slowly pitched forward on his face beside her.

I realized that I wasn't breathing.

Luther shook his head and stared at the bodies. I heard a wail of pain and disbelief and knew it came from him. He started to turn. The blond man lifted his gun and slapped it against Luther's head and Luther went down with the other two.

The dark man went over to the bodies and bent over the man. He took the limp hand and pressed his gun into it, raised it and fired it into the sky. Then he took the gun back and turned toward Luther.

I knew what was going to happen next. The dark man was wearing gloves. He planned to fire a shot into Luther, then drop the gun onto the terrace. The blond had killed the other two. That would leave everything nice and neat, and the police could close the case in a hurry.

I shoved one of the potted plants over, then turned and ran as fast as I could toward the front of the villa.

The pot broke with a crash behind me. I barely heard it. Shouts came from the terrace, shouts of alarm. But there weren't any more gunshots, at least not yet.

I knew they would probably split up, one going around each side of the villa. I had to hurry. Every window I came to, I tried it, but none of them budged. It had been a stupid move, one that I hadn't thought through; instinct had dictated it. Now I was going to pay the price, and Luther wouldn't be a bit better off.

One of the windows slid up in response to my tugging.

I scrambled through it, dropped to the floor of the room inside, and closed the window. I sprawled out, on the thick carpet. It was a bedroom, I saw as I glanced around, but there was nothing in sight that could be used as a weapon. All I could do was keep my head down and hope.

Footsteps pounded by outside the window. I heard more yelling, then car doors slammed and an engine roared. For the first time, I realized how cold it was inside the villa. The central air-conditioning was working full blast, and the sweat on my body was suddenly chilled. Sometime in the last couple of minutes, I had started breathing again. In fact, I was having trouble getting enough air into my lungs.

I stayed there, hugging the floor beneath the window, for as long as I dared. Then I got up, opened the window, and slipped out again.

Luther was still where he had fallen. There was no sign of the two killers. I went to Luther's side, grimacing as I had to step around the bodies, and turned him over. No blood. A pulse beat fast and strong in his neck. The man and woman hadn't been as lucky. I checked them, even though I knew beforehand that they were dead.

The police had to be on the way. I could almost see the dark man

calling them from the first telephone he came to. They had panicked for a moment when they thought that someone else was on the estate, but now they could still make the frame work. If the cops found Luther there with the bodies, no story he told would save him. Not in the befuddled state he was in. Not while he was one of the decadent Americans that the Mexican police, and the Mexican people, have to put up with.

I got my hands under his arms and put my back into lifting him. Getting him on his feet wasn't easy, even as light as he was, and keeping him there was harder. He mumbled and shook his head and tried to come out of it, but when his eyes finally opened, they refused to focus on me.

"Come on," I urged. "Come on, Luther. We've got to get out of here."

He didn't say anything intelligible. I got his feet moving, and we weaved our way back to the front of the villa, away from death.

The quarter-mile back to my car was a long one. Before we got there, I started hearing the whoop of a siren in the distance. That made me speed up, and I was nearly carrying Luther by the time we reached the car.

As I dumped him into the passenger seat and then hurried around to the driver's side, a scary thought struck me. What if the killers had spotted the car parked there and disabled it? But the engine started right up when I hit the key, and it was a sweet sound.

I drove carefully out of the neighborhood. The car window was down, and I could still hear the siren. We were out of sight of the villa's driveway within minutes, though. I started to breathe a little easier. This thing wasn't over, by any means, but now we had a chance. We wouldn't have if the police had found us there.

Luther's head lolled from side to side as I started back toward the village over the winding road. He slumped forward, caught himself with one hand against the dash. He said: "Where . . . where're we . . ."

"We're going to church," I said.

I EXPECTED THE INSIDE OF THE CHURCH TO BE COOL AND shady. It wasn't. Sunlight slanted in through the broken windows and laid patches of heat on the dusty floor. I was out of breath again by the time I got Luther inside.

He was more coherent now; the shock of being knocked out was wearing off. About a fourth of the pews that were originally there still remained, and I sat him down on one of them. His head slumped

forward on his chest, but his eyes were open and he kept mumbling.

I left him there and took a quick look around the church. There was only the one main room, though there was a smaller, windowless chamber behind the altar. The altar was bare, all the implements of worship long gone.

People in the village had seen us come in here. There had been no avoiding that. And they would have been curious enough about the sight of me lugging Luther into the church that they would remember if they were asked about it later. We had to get Luther's belongings together and get out of here. There was a plane ticket for him in my pocket. Once he was back in Texas, the lawyers that his family could hire would straighten everything else out.

I stood in front of him and said: "Where's your stuff, Luther? We're going on a trip, and you've got to get ready." He had to have a passport around somewhere unless he had lost it, and that was the item I was most interested in right now.

He didn't answer me, just kept mumbling like he had all the way back from Puerto Vallarta. I knelt on the floor, put my hands on his bony shoulders, and shook him.

"Come on, Luther!" I urged. "Talk to me. Where's your passport, Luther? Where do you keep your papers?"

His eyes drifted in my general direction. "Papers?" he flapped a hand toward the little room behind the altar.

I hadn't seen anything in there before, but that had been only a quick glance. I went back and looked around for a long moment. In one corner was a loose floorboard. I pulled it up, and that loosened the adjoining ones. A minute's work had several of them up and let me take a small canvas suitcase out of the opening underneath the floor.

The suitcase didn't weigh much. I carried it out into the big room and put it down on the same pew where Luther sat. It wasn't locked. The catches worked easily, and I swung the lid up.

At least a hundred thousand dollars stared back at me.

I GLANCED AT LUTHER; HE WASN'T PAYING ANY ATTENTION to what I was doing. Now that I had had a chance to observe him more, I didn't think he was drunk or drugged. But something was wrong with his brain. He had seen too much, done too much, and now his mind was in retreat. To him, the money was just so much paper.

And right now, I felt the same way. Slowly, quietly, I said: "This isn't what I'm looking for, Luther. We need your passport, so that you can go home."

That struck a chord. "This is my home," he said as he looked up.

That was the first full sentence he had spoken since the incident at the villa. He moved his bleary gaze around the deserted church and said: "This is where I live."

"But you can't stay here now. The police will come and take you away, unless you come with me back to Texas." I had to get that through to him. The killers wouldn't give up on their frame. They'd see to it that the cops found Luther.

Unless . . .

"Luther," I said, "whose money is this?"

He looked at the money, and after a long moment, awareness began to penetrate his brain. "Ronnie . . . Ronnie told me to take care of it." Talking about Ronnie, whoever that was, brought back something else. Luther's face twisted. "Why'd Skip shoot 'em" he asked. "Why'd Skip do a thing like that?"

Ronnie and Skip . . . the dark man and the blond. "Who did Skip shoot?" I asked. I knew we didn't have much time, but if I understood things better, some other way out might suggest itself.

Tears rolled down Luther's face, cutting trails through dirt and beard stubble. "Skip shot 'em," he sobbed. ". . . shot Bill and Jess . . ."

"Who are Bill and Jess?"

"Friends . . . My friends. We had parties there . . . everybody had . . . had a good time. Ronnie got a lot of money . . . made him feel good, him and Skip . . ."

I kept my mouth shut. Luther's eyes were far, far away now, as memories washed over him.

"Everybody laughed and had fun," he said. "We brought the party stuff and made 'em all feel good . . ."

"Party stuff?"

Again the flapping motion toward the back room. Luther didn't say anything, just slumped forward again, dangled his hands between his knees, and bawled.

I ran behind the altar, into the little chamber. Maybe I hadn't looked far enough. Crouching by the opening in the floor, I shoved my arm under the boards and felt for something else. My fingers brushed against canvas.

The money had been a surprise. The contents of the second suitcase weren't.

I saw cocaine, heroin, all kinds of pills. There was even marijuana there. Ronnie and Skip were in the service business, and these were the tools they needed to keep the rich Americans in the area happy.

"Was Ronnie mad at Bill and Jess?" I asked, trying to keep things as simple as possible.

"They were mad at Ronnie," Luther answered when he got his crying under control. "They told him he couldn't have the parties at their house anymore. They said he cheated them."

And probably threatened to tip the cops off to Ronnie's little enterprise, I thought. Things could get vicious after a falling-out between dealer and customer.

I saw the way it laid out now. Ronnie and Skip had used the old church as a base of operations, hiding both the profits and their supply of drugs there. Luther might even have been a customer at one time, but now he was burned out and broke. They had still gotten something from him, though. They had installed him here in the church as a sort of scarecrow, knowing that the villagers would leave the place alone if Luther was living there. They could make their visits in the middle of the night to pick up more merchandise or add to the pile of money in the suitcase. But then Jess and Bill had screwed up their scheme, and Ronnie and Skip, pragmatic businessmen that they were, had decided to close down this operation and move elsewhere. They would take care of Bill and Jess and eliminate that threat, and get rid of Luther at the same time. Everything tidy and neat.

Until I came along and messed things up. But they could still salvage the situation by keeping Luther on the spot for the killings. They could still move on, as they had planned . . .

As soon as they picked up what belonged to them.

THAT REALIZATION CHILLED ME AS MUCH AS THE TOUCH of Ronnie's eyes had earlier in the cafe. I stood up, drew in a lungful of the hot, dusty air, and took Luther's arm. There was no time to worry about passports now. We had to get somewhere else besides this church.

"Let's go, Luther," I said, my voice flat and hard now.

He came with me, stumbling a little, his bare feet kicking up little puffs of dust from the floor.

I had pulled the sagging wooden doors closed as best I could when we came in. Now, with one hand clutching Luther's upper arm, I started to push them open with the other hand.

A bullet slammed into the wood about six inches from my fingers.

They had seen my rental car parked in front of the church, of course. They wouldn't know who I was, but they had to figure that I had Luther. And if I had Luther, they would also figure that I knew about their operation.

The time to be fancy was over. Now all they could do was kill us, grab the moeny, and take off for somewhere else.

I jerked back from the doors as that went through my mind. My fingers dug into Luther's arm and took him with me. I gave him a shove that sent him stumbling behind a pew. "Stay there!" I told him.

During that brief instant the doors had been open, I had seen nothing out of the ordinary. Now, as I crouched behind another pew and wished that there weren't so many broken windows in this place, I realized that I hadn't heard a shot. The pistols had been silenced; that hadn't been necessary at the sprawling estate in Puerto Vallarta. The nearest neighbors there weren't close enough to matter. Here in the village was a different story.

On hands and knees, I scuttled toward the doors. Through the gaps around the frame, I peered out into the sunny street. Across the way was a small store, and parked in the alley beside it was the other rental car. Ronnie and Skip's car.

They were desperate for what was in the church. The drugs were worth at least as much as the cash already on hand. So they wouldn't hesitate to invade the store and take it over while they dealt with Luther and myself.

It was a good thing they didn't know who I was. That way, they couldn't know that I was unarmed. That uncertainty was all that was keeping them from waltzing in here and putting a bullet in each of us.

On the other hand, they couldn't afford a long siege. Sooner or later, someone in town would notice that something was wrong at the store. No, eventually they would rush the church, and that would be the end of it.

I wondered why the hell anybody would build a church without a back door.

I looked over at Luther. He was crouched on the floor behind the pew, but he wasn't sure exactly what was going on. That would have been too much to expect.

"Luther!" I hissed at him. "Is there a gun here, Luther?" I knew that was a lot to hope for, but what better place for a miracle?

"Gun? I don't have a gun." He blinked rapidly, swiveled his head from side to side. He was confused, not really scared.

"Is there any kind of weapon? Something I can fight with?"

He just stared blankly at me.

I sighed. There was always yelling for help, I supposed. But that would probably just get somebody else killed when they came to investigate. I was already worried about what might have happened across the street in the store.

Something buzzed through the still air of the church like a big bee and smacked into the far wall. Another one followed it. I ducked lower

and backed away from the doors.

My eyes fell on the two suitcases, still sitting open on one of the pews. An idea started to form. I went to them, picked them up, closed and fastened the lids.

"How do you get up into the bell tower?" I asked Luther.

I had to repeat the question twice more before he understood what I wanted. Then he said: "There's a ladder . . ."

"Show me."

He wouldn't get up. He just pointed, and I saw a tiny door on the other side of the altar. I carried one suitcase, tucked the other under my arm. The door was low, and I had to stoop to enter the little space beyond. There was a ladder, just like he had said, but the shaft leading upwards was cramped and barely large enough to let my shoulders pass. I started up climbing one-handed.

Before I had taken two of the rungs, Luther was there, crowding into the shaft and tugging at my legs. "Don't take the suitcases!" he said. "Ronnie told me not to let anybody take the suitcases!"

"Dammit, let go of me! Why should you do what Ronnie says?"

"Ronnie's my friend."

Anger boiled over inside me, volatile because of all the fear mixed with it. "You fool! Ronnie's over there across the street trying to kill us! He's not your friend."

In the gloom of the tower shaft, I saw Luther glance toward the street. "Ronnie?" he mumbled. His hands fell away from me, and I went up the ladder as fast as I could.

There was a trapdoor at the top; I could see light all around the edges. And it wasn't locked, thank God. I threw it back, blinked as the sun slapped into my eyes. Then I lifted the suitcases onto the little platform within the tower.

THE TOWER WAS OPEN ON ALL SIDES EXCEPT FOR AN adobe wall that rose about to my waist. Pillars on each corner supported the steep-sided wooden roof. I hauled myself up, keeping low so that Ronnie and Skip wouldn't spot me over the little wall if they happened to look up. I threw the catches on the suitcases, leaving the lids shut but unlatched. Then I took one case in each hand and breathed deeply, flexed my leg muscles and got ready to stand up.

"Ronnie!"

The yell made me grimace. *No!*

Yes. Luther was trying to go back to his friends.

"Ronnie! Skip! It's me, Luther!"

I stood up as I heard the doors open beneath me. I couldn't hear the



shots or the hum of the bullets, but I heard Luther's sudden grunt. I even heard the little mewl of pain that came from him.

And then I sent the suitcases flying out away from the tower. They turned over in mid-air above the street, and their contents spilled everywhere. Money and drugs went flying. The suitcases landed in the street, bounced on the cobblestones, then came to a stop.

Ronnie and Skip exploded out of the store, horror twisting their faces as they saw their fortune swirling in the wind that swept through the town. They weren't the only ones who saw the money. The citizens noticed, too, and suddenly they were converging on the area around the church. I've never seen piranha feeding, but I think I've got an idea what it looks like.

Then I was clambering over the wall, dropping the few feet onto the red stucco tiles of the church's roof, and sliding over the edge like some goddamn swashbuckler. I hit hard and twisted my ankle, but I landed within a few feet of Ronnie.

He didn't see me coming; he was too busy grabbing for fifty-and hundred-dollar bills. I clubbed my hands together and brought them down on the back of his neck as Skip saw me and yelled a warning. Ronnie didn't make a sound as he fell. I went for the gun he dropped.

Pain from ankle and leg slashed through me, and I stumbled and fell. My fingers found the gun butt. I tipped the barrel up, saw Skip running toward me, squeezed the trigger. Nobody noticed the flat whapping sound of the silenced shot.

But Skip went down, his gun skittering away in the street. He rolled and screamed and clutched his stomach. That got people's attention. That high, thin scream even took their minds off all the money floating around.

I got up on hands and knees, climbed the rest of the way to my feet. "*Policia*," I said to the nearest clump of towns-people. "*Policia*."

At least one of them got the idea and went off yelling down the street. I turned and limped into the church.

LUTHER WAS SITTING ON THE FLOOR JUST INSIDE THE doorway, his back propped against one of the pews. There was a blood stain on the front of his white shirt. He looked up at me and said: "Who are you?"

His eyes were clear and alert, and I knew that being shot had shocked him out of the dark mental pit he had been in. I sat down on the same pew and let Ronnie's gun dangle from my fingers.

"My name's Cody. I'm a private detective. Your sister hired me to bring you home."

I saw his shoulders start to move, and at first I thought he was shuddering from the pain, or crying. But he was laughing.

"Evelyn hired you?" he finally asked. "I don't believe it. Evelyn doesn't even like me. Must be something to do with the business."

"That's possible. I didn't ask."

He seemed impossibly strong for someone who had taken a bullet in the chest. I knew it wouldn't last, though. He was functioning now on the impetus of pain and adrenalin.

"Who's screaming?" he asked.

As if on cue, Skip abruptly fell silent. "That was one of your friends," I said. "I think he was called Skip."

"They're not my friends. They shot Bill and Jess, and they shot me. I think they sell drugs. I'm trying to remember . . . It's so hard, everything's so fuzzy . . ."

I saw a young boy, one hand full of money, the other carrying a plastic bag full of brightly colored pills, go running by in the street outside. The local cops were going to have a hell of a time cleaning this mess up, and they weren't going to be happy with me.

I saw a uniform in the doorway. Moving slowly, I put the pistol on the floor and shoved it toward the man with my foot. No need to make anybody trigger-happy. "We need an ambulance," I said. I gestured toward Luther. "And a doctor. *Medico*. Understand?"

He nodded, said "Si," and disappeared, looking just about as confused as when he had first come in. I hoped that he did understand.

I looked at Luther, saw that his head was tipped back and his eyes were closed. But his chest was still moving. I said: "Why the hell didn't you go home sixteen years ago?"

I thought he was unconscious, so I wasn't expecting an answer.

"I went to see the elephant," he said.

"What?" I leaned forward.

With his eyes still closed, he went on, "A man who's been places, done things that no other man has ever done . . . he's been to see the elephant. Like the mountain men . . . the explorers . . ."

His voice was running down. He was getting weak, dancing on the edge of consciousness now. But I understood what he was talking about. I had heard the stories, too, about men who were restless, who couldn't stay where things were safe and secure and boring, who had to risk everything to see what was over the next hill. Luther had seen himself like that, had chased a romantic dream.

"No more elephants," he said. "No elephants anywhere . . . not even here . . ."

His head slowly dipped forward until his chin rested on his thin

chest. His unmoving chest.

He had gone to see the elephant and found only an elephant's graveyard.

But outside, children ran and laughed and whooped and grabbed up fistfuls of money, money that for a little while might offset the poverty. The cops would wind up confiscating most of the drugs, but they wouldn't have a hope of getting the money back. It might have started out dirty, but now it would go where it could do some good.

I stretched my leg out so that the twisted ankle didn't hurt so much and listened to the laughter of the children. ●



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*It wasn't fair, something like that happening to the young kid. It should be one of them, one of the older people who deserved it!*

# The Bus Stops Here

by JAMES McKIMMEY

THE INSTANT BEN OLDFIELD STEPPED INTO THE BUS HE knew that good luck was going to elude him that day. Sitting in the seat he'd come to view as his own was this kid.

As Oldfield climbed up past Harry the driver, who was sixty-five with thirty Greyhound years behind him and was now the part-time jockey of this gambling-special tour bus, he heard voices coming from among the thirty-five retired persons already seated behind the intruder.

"We told him, Ben!"

"We said it was your seat!"

"He won't listen!"

The voices contained the sound of old age and indignity. But Oldfield could see that they were having no influence on the captor of his seat, which was located just back of Harry.

Oldfield, seventy, had seen the kid around town, notably at the service station where he worked, ever since the young man had arrived with his parents six weeks ago. He was extraordinarily handsome with even white teeth now being displayed as the youth grinned jauntily at Oldfield. He wore a black corduroy baseball cap and a red parka that looked brand new. Curly blond hair spilled thickly from underneath the band of the cap.

With the others still calling to him, Oldfield, commonly accepted as captain of this group, held up a palm, saying to the kid: "I always sit in that seat."

"Well, hell, man," said the kid easily, "there're two seats here. Take the one on the aisle. We'll talk it up all the way to Reno."

"I don't intend to talk it up all the way to Reno," Oldfield replied archly. "And I prefer the seat by the window, the one you're in."

"I guess I'm going to have to explain something to you. I'm on my

way to gamble legally for the first time in my life. I've got four-hundred dollars in my wallet that was given to me by my parents to do whatever I want, including blowing it on dice. The reason this came about is because today I am twenty-one years old. And I'll tell you this—nobody is going to get away with telling me to do one damned thing I don't want to do on this day! I like sitting where I am!"

Oldfield could feel the cords of his neck tightening as he glared back at the youth. "What are you going to do about it, Harry?" he asked the driver.

"Well, Ben—there really aren't any reserved seats on this run."

EVERY TWO WEEKS THE TOUR-BUS COMPANY SENT HARRY with the bus to this town in northeastern California where he picked up the group now in it to provide an exclusive hundred-mile ride over the mountains to Reno. The riders were deposited at a large hotel-casino that sponsored the trip. They received free drink tickets and lucky bucks good for free matching bets on the gaming tables. They remained to play for eight hours and then were driven home.

The biweekly outing contributed greatly toward easing the annoyances of loneliness, dimming eyesight, arthritis, fading hearing, and all the other counterments of advancing years owned in common by the riders.

Even on bets made necessarily small by restricted retirement incomes, the excitement of watching dice roll, cards dealt, and symbols of slot machines fall into place was better medicine than most of what came out of pharmacy containers.

Now, the pleasure of a new outing had been disturbed by the invasion of an outsider.

"Tell him to move, Harry," Oldfield ordered, trying to give his age-thinned voice authority.

"He hasn't got the right to do it," the kid responded. "But if he does it, I'm complaining to his company. People older'n me have been telling me what I can do and what I can't ever since I was born! Now I'm twenty-one! And there isn't anybody anywhere telling me what I'm going to do on this day!"

"There're a lot of empty seats, Ben," Harry pleaded apologetically.

Oldfield whirled away from the kid and moved back to a free seat, feeling those neck cords hurting now as he listened to grumbles sounding through the bus.

Harry closed the front door, brakes hissed, and the bus moved forward.

"It's not right," said the spare woman beside who Oldfield had sat

down and who was, he knew, seven years older than he. "His stealing your seat! What happened to respect for your elders!"

Oldfield could feel his body trembling. And he realized how much he wanted to walk back up there and put his hands around that kid's neck and choke him to death.

The intensity of the desire frightened him. And so he took a long breath and tried to think of other things as the bus rolled out of town on its way toward the mountains.

But all he could manage was to keep envisioning that young, handsome, defiant face owned by that kid, an enemy if Oldfield had ever met one.

THE TWISTING ROAD HARRY USED TRAVELING SOUTH WAS the shortest route to 180, and it climbed steeply. Although it was a cold, overcast October day, no snow had yet piled up along the shoulders. And so, as the bus crept to higher elevations, the riders had unobstructed views of the rugged forest terrain that lay below.

As they reached the highest point of the journey, Pineco Pass, the bus crossed over a narrow concrete bridge with the drop-away so severe that more than a few refused to look out in order to prevent lurchings of stomachs. Then they were descending. Because this route was so little used at this time of year, they met no more than two other vehicles before reaching the freeway.

Then Harry let it out. And they rolled eastward full-tilt into Reno.

When the bus stopped in the parking area of the downtown hotel-casino, Oldfield finally had gotten control of his rage.

He'd come to realize that, as he got older, anger came more easily with less provocation than had been the case in the past. Gone was the ability to shrug away calmly difficulties he'd owned earlier in life. It was a condition as realistic as the loss of most of his hair. He tried to keep a steady grip on himself.

But anger again touched his sensibilities as he watched the kid leap to the door so that he could be the first off. And Oldfield hoped with a fervor that the casino would strip him of the four hundred so fast that he would never realize it until it was too late.

INSIDE THE GREAT ARENA OF THE CASINO, OLDFIELD'S group proceeded with habitual familiarity, thinking as one.

Drink tokens and lucky bucks were collected going in. They then hit the nearest bar in the fashion of a flock of aged turkeys, pushing rudely between other seated customers, loudly gobbling out orders, capturing filled glasses with clawed appendages, stiffing bartenders by leaving no

tips, spreading out toward preferred games of chance with wattles quivering.

When one reached a certain age, Oldfield thought, one no longer felt required to cater to small useless civilities.

Choosing to have his drink later, Oldfield found a blackjack table where no others played. A female dealer with a pleasant face who'd come to recognize him greeted him with a smile, shuffled, gave him the deck to cut, and dealt. Oldfield settled in to forget all else but the challenge of the game.

Years ago he'd purchased several books that had instructed him how to count cards using systems of varying degrees of difficulty.

He'd learned and practiced—what else was there to do?—and now he could perform what was commonly known as the plus-minus system with relative competence.

It was a matter of watching the cards as they were dealt from the deck, counting small cards with a plus value and the aces and tens with a minus. Whenever the count was plus, Oldfield knew that he had the advantage and he would increase his bet. Whenever the count was minus, the house had the advantage and he would reduce the wager. After the deck was shuffled, he started over.

The skill had given him a greater ability to ride home as a modest winner rather than repeatedly losing what was his affordable betting limit simply as the result of the built-in odds the house owned.

Playing head to head with a dealer gave him the greatest ability to keep track of cards, he'd learned, as was his advantage on this winter day when customers were sparse.

He played three hands, with the cards going in his favor.

And then the blond kid, carrying a bottle of beer, sat down next to him. The youth removed green bills from his wallet, asked for twenty-five dollar chips, then hunched forward eagerly, saying, "Let's get 'em, grandpa!"

Oldfield, trying to keep from losing his card count, remained for three more hands. During that time the kid split tens, doubled down on two aces, and drew to a pair of nines when the dealer had an up card of two, incredulously winning every hand as Oldfield lost every one of his.

The extraordinarily inept playing scrambled Oldfield's concentration so much that rage again descended on him. He shoved himself up, knocking his stool over. The dealer looked at him in alarm, but the kid failed to notice. Oldfield righted the stool and walked away feeling even his knees shaking.

Now he went to a bar and sat down, exchanged his ticket for a drink, then looked at his face in a mirror behind lined-up bottles. His face had

been one that had been difficult for him to recognize as his own for some time now, with its lined, drawn, pale look of old age. But there it was, with the added strain of anger in it now.

One of his fellow bus travelers sat down beside him, saying indignantly, "That kid shouldn't win a nickel the way he's playing cards!"

"But he's doing it," Oldfield said bitterly, drinking to find calm.

"Don't I know? I've been keeping track. He's at least tripled his money already!"

**EIGHT HOURS IN A CASINO HAD NEVER TURNED TEDIOUS** for Oldfield before. He'd always managed his money so that he never ran out early to be then required to wait sourly in the hotel lobby until it was time to ride home as some of his group repeatedly did.

But today it was going to be different, he realized. Emotional upset continued to juggle his thinking so that he couldn't keep his mind on counting cards. He lost hand after hand.

Running low on money, he tried the dime slots without getting a return. He switched to nickles to get the same results.

He ate lunch at a snack counter; it was eating cardboard.

With four dollars left, he decided that keno might get him out of it. He bought a four-spot ticket and sat down in one of the keno lounges to wait for the numbers to light on a board. A solid four would return him \$180, sufficient to put him back at a blackjack table.

But now he could see the kid again, this time playing craps. The young man was obviously moving from table to table so swiftly, with so much random, that not even the house, Oldfield estimated, was yet aware that he was winning heavily. But one of Oldfield's group had given him a recent report—the kid had turned four-hundred dollars into ten thousand.

Then Oldfield became aware of a new development. Standing next to the kid was one of the most incredibly beautiful young women that Oldfield had ever seen. She literally clung to him as he threw dice and shouted encouragement to them. She squealed. He roared with laughter. Oldfield turned his eyes away, knowing the winning continued.

Numbers lighted on the keno board. None of Oldfield's four was among them. He tried three more times. Never did one of his numbers appear.

Oldfield again examined the young woman, remembering other girls who'd approached being that attractive and that desirable, including his late wife. But they were all so far back in the time tunnel that he



couldn't make them come enough alive in his imagination that they could compete with what he now saw in the flesh.

Feeling a stab of desire, he got up and walked away in order to destroy the inviting proximity of what, now, represented the impossible.

Penniless, he retired to the inactivity of the hotel lobby and sat there in resentful frustration. But members of his crowd, who'd kept track of his whereabouts, periodically kept him apprised of events during his wait for the bus to roll again.

The kid, with his newly acquired companion, was going in and out of other casinos concentrated nearby now. Winning here, winning there—steadily cashing chips in smaller amounts so that no one but Oldfield and his people could be aware of how much he was profiting—the kid was cleaning up awesomely.

"It's wrong!" said one of Oldfield's peers. "There's something wrong with the whole damned world when something like this happens! Why him? Why not one of *us*?"

When the eight hours were finally up, the group gathered outside hotel doors, waiting for the bus. It finally appeared and moved toward them. The kid and the girl were nowhere in sight. And Oldfield was hoping—praying—that they wouldn't appear.

The bus stopped, the door began opening, then they did appear, out of nowhere. They flew past the others, hand in hand, laughing as children might, diving into the bus and securing the two seats behind Harry.

THE BUS AGAIN CLIMBED ALONG THE TWISTING MOUNTAIN road, heading back to where they'd started, doing it in darkness now.

Oldfield sat in an aisle seat, looking at the rear-view mirror positioned above Harry. Because of light from the dash, he could see the driver's face. And because of that same light, Harry, Oldfield knew, was capable of seeing the two young people directly behind him, if dimly.

Now and then their voices came back to Oldfield's ears. He distinctly heard the kid say, before hooting with victorious laughter, "One hundred thousand!"

It turned his mouth dry and his middle into a tight knot.

Finally there were just occasional whispers, sometimes followed by the girl's giggles. But Oldfield could tell by Harry's expressions when Harry glanced up to check the mirror what was happening.

"Goddamn them!" rasped Oldfield's seat mate.

It had to be the mutual sentiment held by everyone in the bus but the young couple, Oldfield knew—even including Harry by now.

The bus growled slowly upward. A giggle sounded again. Oldfield's mind dipped into the distant past as he was certain other vintage brains were doing.

Girls that young, seemingly that beautiful. Boys that young, seemingly that handsome. Other near-dark seats in busses, trains, automobiles. Youth holding youth, fair soft cheeks. Everything lying ahead instead of behind.

It had been eons ago, Oldfield thought grimly, never to be relived.

His hands opened and closed as his eyes identified landmarks illuminated by the bus's headlights.

Another giggle, muffled now.

Oldfield stood up abruptly, saying with genuine authority now, "The bus stops here, Harry!"

Harry brought the bus to a stop on the concrete that bridged Pineco Pass.

Then all of them were up and converging on the two seats behind the driver's position.

Considering their ages, they did it fast.

The kid managed, "Hey! What—?"

The girl screamed.

THE INVESTIGATING DETECTIVE, A LARGE MAN IN HIS thirties, sat on a corner of the sheriff's desk with a clipboard propped on on one knee. "It's so hard to believe!"

The gray-haired sheriff shrugged. "It's what it comes to."

"But for those kids to demand that the bus stop on that bridge. For them to get out into the night and the cold and order the bus on. Then apparently jump from the bridge to the rocks where we found them. *Why?*"

"We know the kid's parents gave him four-hundred bucks for his birthday. There wasn't a dime on him when we got to him. Obviously he lost it in the casinos. Then got depressed. Suicide's a big thing with young people these days."

"But why would the girl join him? He just picked her up that afternoon!"

"Maybe he pushed her, then jumped himself. I don't know. All I can say is kids are weird. And all we can do is go with the testimony."

The detective finally nodded. "We can't argue with that, I guess. Not testimony from thirty-seven solid senior citizens."

*It was an easy job that paid lots of money. Unfortunately, there were occupational hazards that could prove fatal!*

# Night Service

by WILLIAM E. CHAMBERS

KELLY MARSH STUDIED HER TARGET CAREFULLY WHILE crossing the street. He was middle aged, wore a five o'clock shadow and was perspiring under the hot summer sun in an ill fitting suit. Kelly noticed his quick darting glances and the absent minded way he patted the breast pocket of his jacket while standing aloof from the sprinkling of people by the yellow curbed bus stop. She observed that his actions confirmed her employer's understanding of his habits. She also noticed how his gaze traveled over her figure, lingering for a moment on her blue halter.

Kelly stiffened as he attempted to flag down a cab, then relaxed when he was bypassed for a more promising looking fare. She smiled upon catching his eye, walked toward him and said, "Excuse me, sir."

"Yes?" He looked at her uncertainly. "What? What is it?"

"I know this is going to sound dumb, but—" Kelly looked down, feigning embarrassment. "I lost my wallet a couple of hours ago and I'm trying to raise enough money for a train ride upstate where I'm

starting a job. Could you help me out?"

"No." The mark folded his arms tightly across his chest. "I'm broke."

"Not even a dollar?" She drew a five and two singles from the left hand pocket of very tight denim shorts. "I managed to get seven so far. All I need is three more."

"I can't. I ain't got it."

Kelly spotted the bus coming, so she brushed against him sensually and said, "Please. Just a dollar."

The mark swallowed hard, then thrust his hands impatiently into his pockets. "All's I can spare is some change."

Kelly accepted the coins, kissed his cheek and took note of the pleased flush that crept up his face. He boarded the bus without ever suspecting that her hand had slipped into his jacket and removed the stuffed white envelope from his breast pocket.

Kelly turned and walked quickly around the corner to the car that was waiting for her. She never looked back at the rapidly moving bus nor saw the terror stricken face peering frantically through its rear window.

**KELLY MARSH'S BARE LEGS FELT STICKY AGAINST THE** leather cushions of the sofa in Lou Simms' living room. Simms, a swarthy man with slick black hair and a patent leather mustache, leaned against the octagon-shaped bar to her left and counted the bills in the envelope she had given him. He took some of the bills out, tucked the envelope into the pocket of his red silk smoking jacket, and threw Kelly a leer that made her wince. He said, "Eighty-five hundred for me. Fifteen hundred for you. Not bad for a few minutes work, eh?"

Although Kelly found Simms's falsetto twang irritating, she forced a smile and rose to her feet. "It's very generous, sir."

"Not at all, my dear." Simms waved nonchalantly. "I'll even throw in five hundred more if you'll have a martini with me."

The discomfort Kelly felt over his devouring looks were made tolerable by this unexpected generosity. "Why, thank you."

"Remember, Kelly." He slipped behind the bar and began mixing two martinis. "I'm very generous to anyone who's nice to me."

Kelly hoped the shudder that passed through her wasn't noticeable. She glanced around his penthouse apartment, pretending to admire his expensive furniture and original paintings while hoping a change of subject would divert his attention from her. After a bit of small talk, Kelly found her hand covered by his. He said "Kelly, I really find you

very attrac—”

The antique French telephone under the bar abruptly rang. Simms released her hand and reached for it. Kelly sighed and thought, *Saved by the bell.*

She listened as Simms told the caller, “Yes. Alonzo Silici owed me money. Eighty-five hundred. The man had no luck with horses. What? No problem. He paid me today. I hate to tell you this since he’s one of your boys and all, but I had to call him up and lean on him the other day. I let the vigorish go because he’s one of yours and—hell—maybe you can do me a solid someday.”

Kelly felt a lump form in her throat when Simms winked at her and replied to the caller’s question by saying, “That’s right. There was a girl involved. She delivered the money along with a note from Alonzo. You should educate that guy. His spelling is terrible. What? Of course not. I keep nothing around in writing. It’s ashes now. Her name? Kelly Marsh. Lives on Grove street in the Village. I went through her wallet while one of my boys distracted her. I like to know who I’m dealing with. Sure thing. Anytime.”

When Simms hung up the phone, Kelly asked, “Is everything all right?”

“It will be if you do what I said and stick to your story.”

“I really have to go, Mr. Simms.” Kelly saw his eyes resume their coverage of her body. “I’m working tonight.”

“I doubt that very much, Kelly.” He shook his head slowly. “I really doubt that very much.”

KELLY STOPPED OFF AT THE BANK, STUCK FIFTEEN HUNDRED dollars into her safe deposit box, then returned home with the other five. Her apartment was a small, studio type, plainly furnished and air conditioned only by two ceiling fans. She jumped when the phone rang, then gingerly lifted it, and said, “Hello?”

“Hi, love.”

“Doris.” Kelly’s inner tension dissolved in a sigh. “It’s you.”

“Who were you expecting, Morgan Fairchild?”

“I didn’t know what to expect. I worked that deal today.”

“How did it go?”

“O.K. so far. The hardest part’s still coming.”

“Just do as you were told. Simms never steered me wrong.”

“Did he ever try to make it with you?”

“He knows I don’t mix business with pleasure.”

Kelly’s voice chilled. “Pleasure.”

“Give him the right message and he’ll back off. There’s plenty of

other things he can use us for. And he does pay well.”

“For sure. Maybe one of these days we’ll take that vacation you’re always dreaming about.”

“Yeah. Think of it. Palm trees. Sand. Surf. Sun. And most importantly—”

“No men.”

“Exactly.” Doris laughed. “No men.”

Kelly hung up the phone and changed into the white jump suit with black spots that was standard attire for tending bar in a nearby lounge called the Leopard’s Den. Slinging a handbag over her shoulder, she opened the door and stopped short at the sight of an athletic looking man leaning casually against her doorjamb. Wearing designer jeans and a shirt opened to the waist, he was so blond and tanned, he seemed made of bronze. Grinning lewdly, he asked, “Are you Kelly Marsh?”

“Yes.” Kelly put on her best bewildered look. “Why? Who—”

“I have business with you, Kelly.” The man’s grin hardened. “Step inside, please.”

“Now wait just a minute.” Kelly’s tone turned angry. “You can’t just—”

The man’s hand darted toward Kelly’s neck and she suddenly felt every muscle in her body tighten. Unable to resist, she retreated woodenly into the apartment under his grasp. When he released her, she felt as though her legs would give out. Knocking the door closed with his elbow, he spoke through his grin. “Pressure points. One type of touch paralyzes. Another type kills. Be smart, sweetheart. Listen to the man.”

A cold clammy snake seemed to curl its way up Kelly’s spinal cord. Her heart started pounding so hard she wondered if her assailant could hear it. Fighting back the jitters, she asked, “Is this a robbery? I—I have—”

“Do I look like a thief to you?” He cocked an eyebrow and laughed. “How insulting.”

“Then what—what do you want?”

“Information.” He dropped his voice to a sarcastic whisper. “Did you run an errand for someone today?”

“Yes. I—I delivered an envelope to a man named Lou Simms.”

“Who gave you the envelope?”

“Alonzo Silici.”

“There’s a van waiting for us downstairs. You and I are going to a meeting.”

“A meeting? With who?”

“It’s better you don’t know. Just do as I ask and you won’t have any

problems.”

“I—I have to call my job. Tell them I’m sick or something.”

“Make it fast.”

THE BLOND MAN ESCORTED KELLY INTO THE BACK OF the van, handed her an eyemask and said, “Put this on.”

Kelly’s nerves were such that she wasn’t sure if the ride had taken twenty minutes or an hour. Her companion’s touch was like an electric shock to her elbow. “Get ready. We’re stopping now.”

Kelly felt gravel crunch under her feet as he guided her up three creaking steps into a musty room. Sitting her down on something hard, he said, “Here she is, boss.”

A husky voice asked, “Are you Kelly Marsh?”

“Yes. Yes, sir.”

“Did you go on a special errand today?”

“Yes. I all ready told this man about—”

“Tell me.”

“I met a man named Alonzo Silici in a bar called Stafford’s in Chelsea. He told me if I delivered an envelope to a man named Lou Simms, I’d be well paid. I did it and I was.”

“Did you know Silici?”

“I saw him in various bars now and then.”

“Are you in the habit of frequenting a lot of bars?”

“Yes. I mean—tending bar is my job. This is my way of looking for better opportunities jobwise.”

“I see. Did you know what was in the envelope?”

“He said it was money. A debt.”

“Weren’t you a bit suspicious of an offer like this from a person who was practically a stranger?”

“Yes. But I was doing it in broad daylight and the address I was going to was very fashionable. I really didn’t think there would be any trouble. Besides, Alonzo paid me fifty dollars to do it.”

“Fifty? I just found five hundred in your purse.”

“The rest came from Mr. Simms. He really shocked me with that big a tip.”

The gravelly voice then asked, “Well, Alonzo, what do you say to all this?”

“It ain’t true, boss.” Kelly’s stomach tightened when she heard the whining voice of the man whose pocket she had picked. “I never saw this girl until she hit me up for some change today and picked my pocket.”

In spite of her fears, Kelly forced herself to sound indignant. “That’s

a lie! You paid me to do an errand. I work for a living. I don't pick pockets!"

The questioner snapped, "Be quiet, Miss Marsh! Alonzo, word has been around for some time now that you were in hock to Simms' loan sharks because of your gambling. The last time you welshed on him, he was going to do a number on you but he called us out of respect and your brother saved you by paying up. So what do you do? You put yourself right back in the same boat without anyone to back you up this time."

"Listen—boss—my brother woulda bailed me out—"

"Really? Why didn't he?"

"He doesn't know. He musta took a trip or somethin'. I can't reach him. As soon as I could I know—"

"You know nothing, Alonzo. You're stupid. I was in the room with you when your brother told all of us that he was through bailing you out; that you were on your own. You said you understood and agreed to quit screwing around. Instead, what do you do? You steal *our* money!"

"No, boss! Honest! I—"

"Shut him up!"

Kelly gasped upon hearing a cracking sound, a groan and a thud. The questioner said, "Thank you for your cooperation, Miss Marsh. You will be escorted home the same way you arrived. Forget everything you heard tonight. That will be best all around."

KELLY ENTERED HER APARTMENT AND FOUND DORIS curled up on the couch sipping a glass of beer. Looking cute in jeans and a T-shirt the short haired brunette smiled and said, "How'd everything go, Kelly?"

"Feel like a character from a grade-b movie." Kelly rolled her eyes. "I've got to call the lounge and find out if they found someone to sub for me. Hope I didn't lose my job."

"No problem. I was having a drink with Lou Simms when you called. One of his lady friends took your spot for the night."

"That guy's handy to have around at times. Tonight was scary, but I am two grand richer."

"I told you it pays to be nice to him." Doris sipped her beer. "As long as you don't have to be *too* nice."

THE FOLLOWING EVENING WAS QUIET IN THE LEOPARD Lounge. Kelly was serving double manhattans to a tired looking middle-aged man when Lou Simms strolled through the door. Giving



her his usual leer, he ordered a martini and said, "Not much doing, eh?"

"Very little." She placed the drink in front of him and nodded toward the TV blaring from a shelf high on the wall above the bar. "Just waiting for the eight o'clock movie to kill time."

"Know what you mean."

Simms laughed, then fell quiet as a bulletin flashed across the screen. The newscaster said, "Another classic gangland slaying has occurred in our city.

"The body of a small-time hood named Alonzo Silici has been found tied and gagged in the trunk of a stolen car parked on a deserted street in the South Bronx. He was shot twice in the back of the head, proving once again that in spite of the mayor's task force, criminal elements are alive and well in New York City. The motive behind this murder is not yet known."

Kelly's knees quivered as the impact of the broadcast hit her. Simms saluted the TV with his glass and whispered, "Sayanora to welshers."

THE STORY OF ALONZO SILICI'S DEATH WAS SOON BURIED in the avalanche of current news events and within a few days it seemed like a distant memory to Kelly. Actually she was musing over vacation brochures depicting the delights of Jamaica when the telephone in her apartment rang and disturbed her thoughts. Plucking the receiver from the wall, she said, "Hello?"

"Hi, Kelly." The irritating nasal twang sounded slightly different. She wondered if Simms had a summer cold. "I have another job for you. Interested?"

Kelly fingered the brochure on Jamaica, then remembered the disquieting experience she'd had working for him just recently. "I don't know. It—it was kind of scary last time."

"How much did I pay you last time, Kelly?"

"Mr. Simms, you know—"

"How much, Kelly?"

"Two thousand."

"This time I'll make it three."

Kelly's eyes widened in disbelief. "Three thousand?"

"Yes. For doing the same thing. And this time it'll be a piece of cake. No late night callers. I guarantee it. Now are you interested?"

"Yes." Kelly nodded eagerly. "Definitely."

"Good. Now let me brief you."

Kelly listened closely to the details concerning the time, place and what the man looked like. Afterwards, she said, "Will you have a car

waiting like the last time?"

"Uh—sure. It'll be parked just around the corner in front of the movie theatre. You won't be able to miss it. A long gray Caddy."

"All right." Kelly laughed nervously. "I'll really be riding in style."

THE MAN WAS IN HIS MID-FIFTIES, DISTINGUISHED AND cool looking in a three piece suit in spite of the fact that the open windowed cab he stepped out of was obviously not air conditioned. Catching his eye, Kelly smiled and said, "Excuse me, sir."

Stopping mid-stride, he looked at her with interest. "Yes?"

Kelly drew the seven dollars from her pocket and went into the routine about losing her wallet and needing carfare. The man's look and tone became quite sympathetic as he asked, "How much more do you need, dear?"

"Three more dollars. It costs ten to get upstate."

"Surely you'll need more than the bare minimum. Have you eaten today?"

Kelly looked downward sheepishly. "Just breakfast."

"One meal a day will never do." The man smiled graciously as he drew his wallet out of his back pocket and produced a twenty dollar bill. "Here you are. This should cover lunch as well as carfare. Good luck with your new job."

Kelly kissed his cheek, slipped her hand into his jacket and dropped the envelope he was carrying into her shoulder bag while a pleased smile crossed his face. Kelly climbed into the Cadillac feeling a twinge of guilt over having robbed such a nice man.

Kelly didn't recognize the burly driver sitting at the wheel but she thought nothing of it, figuring Simms must have plenty of hired help. However, when the driver turned up the ramp to the Fifty-Ninth street bridge, she became concerned and said, "Excuse me. This isn't the way to Mr. Simms' apartment. Where are we going?"

"Don't worry, dear." The driver smiled amiably. "Your meeting is over in Queens."

Kelly felt uneasy when the driver crossed the bridge, then took some back streets to a deserted waterfront area. Stopping before a seemingly abandoned warehouse, he stepped out of the car, opened the door for her and said, "This way, please."

In spite of the summer temperature, Kelly felt a chill as gravel crunched under her shoes. The driver accompanied her up the three steps leading into a large, litter strewn room. Kelly's breath caught in her chest as she saw the dapper man she had just victimized sitting at a round table with the bronze looking man she had dealt with earlier in

the week. Standing behind them, arms folded, was a thin elderly man in a pinstriped suit. He motioned to an empty chair by the table and spoke with a husky voice. "Sit down, Miss Marsh."

Kelly clasped her hands together to control their trembling and sank slowly down on the hard chair. She shrank back under the hard glare of the dapper man whose pocket she had picked. He said, "Allow me to introduce myself. I'm John Silici. Alonzo's brother."

Kelly's lips moved several times before she managed to form some words. "Where's Mr. Simms?"

"Mr. Simms?" The blond man laughed as John Silici mimicked the familiar nasal twang. "I'm Mr. Simms. At least I was on the phone."

The elderly man interrupted by saying, "Miss Marsh, this is a formal hearing. Actually, it's a trial. You are accused of causing the death of Alonzo Silici. If you are truthful with us, we may show mercy. If we catch you in one lie, you will die immediately. Do you understand?"

Kelly fought the sudden nausea that gripped her stomach and managed to say, "Yes. I—I understand."

"Very good." The elderly man nodded somberly. "Now tell us the truth regarding Alonzo Silici."

KELLY NARRATED THE WHOLE STORY OF HOW LOU SIMMS taught her to pick pockets and set Alonzo up. Apparently he knew when Alonzo was picking up money. She said he explained how it would be much easier for a pretty woman to get close to him than it would for a man. John Silici agreed saying, "Yes. My brother wasn't very smart but he was clever enough to dodge a male pickpocket. Simms will have to pay for this."

"You're right, John. Simms got the word that you wouldn't cover Alonzo's debts anymore so he took *our* money and set your brother up. Two birds with one stone."

"I laid it on pretty thick the last time Alonzo got into trouble." A pained expression crossed John Silici's face. "But if I had known, I would've paid off."

"That's what Alonzo said." The elderly man agreed. "But you had us convinced otherwise. We did call you before taking action, John, but we couldn't reach you."

"I was upstate camping. I came down as soon as I heard about my brother's death on the radio." John Silici's cold glare returned to Kelly. "When these people told me what my brother said, I figured you and Simms had set him up. And the little trick I played on you proved it. I just knew he wasn't crazy enough to steal from the Organization."

"But Mr. Silici—" Hot tears tumbled from Kelly's eyes. "I didn't

know he would be killed. Honest—”

“Quiet!” The elderly man ordered. Turning to John Silici, he said, “I’m really sorry, John. We were all taken in.”

Silici thumped the table with his closed fist and said, “Sir, I request permission to come out of retirement so I can correct some injustices.”

“Of course.”

“I’d like permission to kill Miss Marsh.”

Kelly’s body sagged as she moaned, “Oh God!”

“Now just a moment, John.” The elderly man placed a comforting hand on John Silici’s shoulder. “Miss Marsh is guilty of depriving you of a brother. But she also deprived us of a competent courier. Now she has to pay back. And she can’t do that if she’s dead.”

A sense of dread coursed through Kelly as the elderly man fixed his gaze on her and asked, “Miss Marsh, do you want to die?”

Kelly shook her head weakly.

“Answer please.”

“No.”

“Then I will offer you one alternative. In exchange for your life, you shall have to render your services to us for an indefinite period of time.”

“My services?” Kelly’s sagging frame suddenly straightened. “What would—what would I be doing?”

The blond man chuckled and spoke for the first time since Kelly arrived. “With a face and figure as lovely as yours, what do you think you’ll be doing?”

Kelly’s frame sagged, again. “I see.”

“Come now.” The elderly man said. “You won’t be working the streets as long as you keep your looks up to par. We’re an international organization. You’ll travel and deal with people from the finest of circles. Of course, you’ll receive no salary; that’s part of the punishment. But your expenses will be paid. Now, do you accept our terms?”

Kelly considered the alternative and resigned herself to defeat. “Yes.”

“You understand, of course, that to renege means death.”

“Yes. I understand.”

“Have you any relatives?”

“A stepfather in Ohio. But we don’t bother with each other.”

“Any close friends?”

“Just one. Her name is Doris—”

“You will sever all ties with her immediately. We’ll move you to another city where nobody knows you. It’s easier doing business that

way."

Kelly just nodded, unable to speak. The man continued, "Oh! One more thing. We'll tattoo a heart on your left shoulder. Our trademark. Your clients will think it's cute. They always do."

JOHN SILICI CROUCHED LOW IN THE LUXURIOUS SUNKEN tub in Lou Simms's bathroom. Pressing his ear to the wall, he found he could pick up snatches of conversation. Twice the light flashed on so the bathroom could be used but the dark shower curtain behind the frosted glass pane concealed his presence. The first time the bathroom was used by a young woman who made ribald jokes to Simms through the closed door. Later it was obvious that Simms was using the john.

Silici waited patiently until he heard Simms wish his friend good night, then he quietly slid the shower door open and stepped out of the tub. The swarthy man was humming happily and pouring a martini from a crystal pitcher when Silici, holding a snub nosed .38 revolver, walked into the room. Simms's bloodshot eyes widened and the grin on his face froze. Spilling some of the drink on his satin smoking jacket, he said, "John—what—what are you doing here?"

"Paying back a debt. I know you don't like to be owed."

Simms raised both hands shoulder high. "John—listen—"

"Drink your martini, Lou." Silici thumbed back the hammer on his pistol. "Finish the whole pitcher or I'll plaster your brain all over the wall."

Simms clutched the glass with two shaking hands and raised it to his mouth. When he drained it, Silici motioned toward the pitcher with his gun. Simms followed the silent order until he finished every last drop. Silici said, "You must be hot from all that booze. Let's go out on the roof and get some fresh air."

The lights of the city shone like jewels in the night as Silici walked the frightened man out onto the roof and shoved him against the waist high rail. Simms's nasal twang fell to a guttural whisper. "John—please—let me explain—"

"There's nothing to explain, Lou. I know the story."

"If—if you harm me—my—my—organization will go to war with yours. They'll—"

"What war, Lou?" Annoyance twisted Silici's features. "You drank two many martinis and wandered out on the roof. The locks on your door weren't hard for me to pick and I'll see to it that they're fastened when I leave. There won't be any hint at all of foul play."

Beads of sweat gave Simms's mustache a greasy look. "John—I'll give you anything! Anything!"

Silici collared him with his free hand and pressed him backwards over the railing. Sweeping his feet out from under with a sudden kick, he watched Simms hurtle into the night. He said, "Give me back my brother."

KELLY MARSH GLANCED AROUND HER STUDIO APARTMENT for the last time, then looked at the tiny red heart on her left shoulder while dialing Doris' telephone number. The bronze man slouched nonchalantly on her couch and watched her with a bemused look. When her friend answered, she said, "It's me."

"Hi, honey. What's up?"

"I'm leaving town tonight, Doris. For good."

"Leaving town?" Alarm raised the pitch of Doris's voice. "Why? Where are you going?"

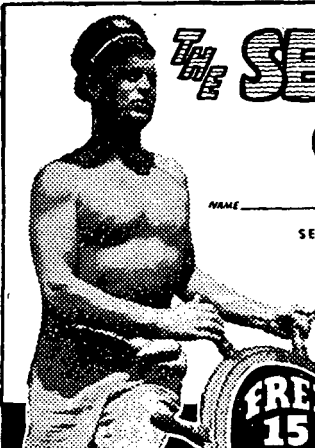
"I—I can't tell you."

"Can't tell—Kelly! What's going on?"

"I've—I've found another job."

"A job?" Kelly heard the sudden rush in Doris' breath. "Doing what?"

"I really can't explain." Kelly kept her voice steady, though tears spilled from her eyes. "It's—it's a form of—night service." ●



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*There was no doubt who killed the woman. The problem was proving it was murder!*

# Too Much Sun

by JERRY JACOBSON

IN THE MATTER OF THE DEATH OF ROXANNE THOMAS, the coroner's inquest fell quite naturally. Naturally, because Mrs. Thomas had been struck by an automobile while walking in a designated crosswalk. And because, seemingly *not so* naturally, the operator of the vehicle had been her husband.

Almost concurrent with the revelation of these raw facts had come into Lt. Seabreeze's mind the notion of premeditation. And it was a powerful notion, a certain notion, and Seabreeze fixed upon it like a vital navigational star in space whose location was needed to return to earth or be lost out there forever. There was no doubt in his mind the accident was planned in advance and that Bain Thomas had murdered his wife.

Thomas had been neither arrested nor charged with any crime. His car had been towed to the Police Impound Garage for routine examination, but that had been all. During the time between the incident, the funeral and the upcoming inquest, Seabreeze was to put his nose into the matter to see whether the Detective Division could make any sort of case for premeditation. He was not to interview the husband at any point, was neither to harrass him, nor have him followed, nor search his residence. Aside from these restrictions, he was to make any other inquiries he liked of anyone.

Evidence, clues and leads were not epidemic. He had just seventy-two hours to make something of his gut feelings about Thomas' guilt, because when he took the witness stand at the inquest, his gut feelings had to be left behind. Facts and evidence was the only baggage the court would allow him to carry with his testimony.

THE DEAD WOMAN HAD BEEN STRUCK IN A PEDESTRIAN

crosswalk in the downtown business district. The time of her death had been pinpointed at 2:58 p.m. on a sunny Wednesday afternoon. Roxanne Thomas had been returning to work from lunch at the Brasserie Pittsbourg and window shopping in the White-Whitney Mall, both of which were located directly across Yankee Avenue and the office building in which she worked. In that section of crosswalk, on that particular afternoon, and at that particular time of day, she had been walking alone.

Bain Thomas had turned the corner at Union Bay Street to head west down one-way Yankee Avenue. He was driving in the left-hand traffic lane and he had made a legal turn. If he had increased his speed down that half-block section of Yankee there was no way to tell. There were no pedestrian witnesses to rely upon for that.

Roxanne Thomas had stepped out from behind a United Parcel truck, which had been legally parked in a load-unload zone, had strode four more paces out into the traffic lane and there met her death. One red pump shoe broke free from its red strap and flew from her foot. Oddly, the shoe was never recovered or returned. Apparently, some passerby had walked off with it.

Bain Thomas' preliminary statement had been taken nine hours after the incident at a hospital on nearby Pill Hill where he had been rushed to be treated for shock. He told police the sun had appeared suddenly between office buildings, temporarily blinding him behind the wheel. In late afternoon and in late January, there was no astronomical question that the sun had been low in the clear, blue sky and far down the horizon. And well below the towering midtown skyscrapers. It would all check out from A to Z, and Seabreeze knew it would.

Thomas' own office building was situated eight blocks east and north of the accident scene. Questioned about his destination, he stated he had been on his way to city's sports dome to pick up reserved seat tickets for that evening's professional basketball game. His tickets had been prepaid with a credit card and left for him at the Will Call booth. A computer print out at the stadium's business office also listed him by name as one of 929 no-shows for that evening's game.

Yankee Avenue was not the quickest route to the stadium, but it was geographical fact that it met with the stadium's parking lot fifteen blocks farther to the west, so a strong case could be made for Thomas' having driven a legitimate route.

But weaker as a legitimate act was his driving to the stadium at all to pick up his tickets. Why should there be urgency to claim tickets that were safely reserved for only him? Why not claim the tickets a few minutes before the start of the game and avoid all the downtown



afternoon traffic? No, the trip was a wasted move and Seabreeze knew it.

Thomas further stated that his guest at the game was to have been his wife. Simple inquiries by Seabreeze of several of Roxanne Thomas' co-workers at Olympic Delta Corporation more than confirmed her hatred of basketball, as was her feeling about *all* sports. When Bain Thomas chose sports matches as television fare at home, his wife would calmly walk from the room, sometimes even from the house. Just who did Bain Thomas think he was kidding? His wife would have been the very *last* person he would have invited to a sports event.

But, then these were phantom seats, never meant to be occupied. They existed only to provide Thomas with a reason to be driving in the downtown business district so that a little autocide could be committed.

A dead woman and two empty stadium seats. If Seabreeze could have picked his own place to begin, this wouldn't have been it.

But it was encouraged by the fact that two of the three imperatives needed to commit murder did exist. Bain Thomas *did have* the opportunity to murder and he *did have* the means. He had his wife in his sights through the windshield of his car and he had that car itself as a murder weapon. Yet means and opportunity were left dangling in the air like faulty mobiles when they could not be connected to motive.

But if Bain Thomas had good reason to murder, Seabreeze would find it.

THAT SEARCH BEGAN BADLY. THERE WAS NO GREAT FAMILY wealth to be gained by a surviving spouse. Each was named as sole beneficiary in the other's will and life insurance policy, but no windfall would accrue to the survivor.

Save for a \$65,000, three-bedroom home in Briar Hills, the family held no property, no undeveloped real estate, no business or corporate interests, no other tangible assets except for two family automobiles and a pure-bred Manx cat named Arturo.

There then arose in Seabreeze's mind the possible existence of another woman in Bain Thomas' life. He tried to pick out a likely candidate at Roxanne Thomas' funeral and at the graveside later. No such mysterious female turned up dressed in black, although one young, slender woman came to the cemetery and stood apart from the knots of others. But when Seabreeze spoke with her briefly at the conclusion of Roxanne Thomas' burial, the woman who said her name was Jo Prather told Seabreeze she knew the deceased, but had never met Bain Thomas and indeed would have had a hard time even picking the widower out from the other males were it not for the fact he'd been

the last to leave the open pit of Roxanne Thomas' grave.

It appeared no female stranger would likely turn up in Bain Thomas' past or present. Seabreeze sensed a cold trail and gave it up.

That left for his consideration the possibility of a man lurking in the backwaters of *Roxanne Thomas'* life. Seabreeze had an arm and leg to give for just five minutes in front of diaries or address books or purses whose nooks and crannies held small slips of paper with names and telephone numbers scribbled on them. But that territory, too, was designated off-limits to him by the Chief of Detectives.

But he was cut enough official slack to make inquiries along those lines of the dead woman's co-workers at Olympic Delta Corporation, but no names were forthcoming. He checked with waiters and waitresses at the Brasserie Pittsbourg restaurant, holding out faint hope for a male dining partner, but was told Roxanne Thomas lunched only with girlfriends or with other female employees of Olympic Delta. Seabreeze was searching for fruit in a barren orchard.

When all this work was done, only sixteen hours remained in front of the coroner's inquest. Seabreeze felt to his marrow that Bain Thomas was a murderer, but that was a thing which could not be proved. Even Thomas' murder weapon would be turned back to him from Police Impound at the conclusion of the inquest, its grillwork dented and its left headlight veined with fresh cracks, that car every bit the smoking pistol it was.

These blue thoughts Seabreeze had at midnight on the evening before the inquest, when he gave up tossing and turning in his bed, heaved himself up from it and made some coffee. What use had he for sleep now? His appearance at the inquest would be empty ritual. Clean-shaven or with a face shadowed with two day's growth of stubble, dozing or wide awake, stone cold sober or butchered drunk and flat on his lips, he would still be asked only the single question by the inquest judge at four-thirty p.m.: had he any evidence to present that the death of Roxanne Thomas was other than accidental? His reply didn't need rehearsal or study or read from note cards. Because his reply would be a one-word No.

THE COFFEE WAS STILL PERCOLATING WHEN THE TELEPHONE rang. The abrupt sound didn't shock or disturb him. He knew a hundred cops who were that inconsiderate and more than a handful of city attorneys. And a few women. And the clocks of informants, vengeful arrestees and ex-wives had no hands.

But this caller was none of those. This caller was much worse.

"Seabreeze? Charles Seabreeze, the police detective?"

"Who is this?"

"Well, tomorrow's the big day, huh?"

The caller was a male. It was a voice he did not recognize, and yet

"Yeah, it's Seabreeze all right." His caller wasn't standing on any ceremony. And his tone was gloating. "You know who the inquest judge is yet? Doesn't matter. We won't be taking up his time in that courtroom very long."

It was Bain Thomas. Seabreeze had never met him and he'd never heard his voice, but it was Thomas and he had a month's pay to bet on it.

"You there, Seabreeze?" came the voice again, the dislike in it as evident as venom in a snake's fangs. "You want to tape this phone call, I don't mind. It can't be admitted in court and we both know that. Cassette, reel-to-reel. Hell, make a video if you got the equipment."

"What do you want, Thomas?" Seabreeze said.

"Just to tell you that I murdered her, Seabreeze. But I think you know that already. Yeah, you've been checking up on me these last three days like Mrs. Muir checking for ghosts. You even showed up at the funeral and at the cemetery. You were checking for strangers and so was I. Strangers and police detectives."

"Is that all, Thomas? I want to get some sleep."

"Roxanne'd been taking late lunch at the Brasserie Pittsbourg for over a year. They got her on Flex Time there at Olympic Delta. Staggered work hours to miss all the freeway traffic. Lunch, two-to-three p.m. every day. Five minutes before three, she leaves to go back across Yankee Avenue to work. I've been stalking that sun across the sky for over a month, Seabreeze. I *knew* when it would come from behind those buildings on Yankee. And I *knew what time* I would be blinded by it behind the wheel of my car. I just had the one shot at it. Wednesday afternoon. No other time and no other day, not for another year. But I got lucky, Seabreeze. There was Roxanne coming from the restaurant, there was me driving down Yankee, and there was the sun, blazing away and right on schedule."

"Why did you kill her Thomas?"

"You want me to provide you with my motive, is that it, Seabreeze? Do your work for you? She had a lover and I found out who it was. Let's you and me leave it at that, okay?"

Seabreeze figured as much. He wanted to ask Thomas who the man was, but sensed the futility in that. He was a killer who didn't have all the spots on his dice; but he wasn't so deranged that he'd blurt out the names and numbers of all the players.

"You check out the sun yourself if we have a clear day tomorrow. Drive down Armory Avenue, the next one-way west street after Yankee. Or Stenbaugh, two blocks south of Armory. At 3:58 p.m., the sun will have shifted on to the next group of skyscrapers, given that it sets a little earlier each day. You can even double-check the times with the State Meteorological Society like I did in an anonymous call."

"No need, Thomas. I believe you were sunblinded and so will the inquest judge, so why should I waste my time on a bastard like you? Just put up the phone, go into your kitchen, find a good carving knife and take yourself a few slashes."

But Thomas' derisive, madman's laughter was so loud and shrill over the line, Seabreeze doubted his advice had been heard well enough to be taken, so he simply slammed his receiver back onto its wall cradle hard enough to crack plastic.

The insanity of Bain Thomas' laughter stayed there inside Seabreeze's head all night, like an asylum scream. He woke at eleven a.m. with his blankets and bedsheet reversed and faintly damp. His only duty was the four-thirty inquest. He felt he wasn't going to be able to stay awake during it.

HE WOLFED SOME ASPIRIN AND A FISTFUL OF OREOS AND took a look out the front door to see what kind of day was out there. It was clear and cold, with a sun in the sky as bold as anything. The same kind of day Bain Thomas had ordered for his wife's killing.

He telephoned the Detectives Division and asked a narc just coming off-duty named Coker (which still got a laugh sometimes) if he knew the name of the inquest judge assigned to the Thomas death. Coker said to wait a sec and he'd go check.

"Rostowitz," said Coker after a minute. "Courtroom B-8. Old Speed of Light Rostowitz, huh? No moss grows on his litigation, Seabreeze. You got anything on this Thomas guy?"

"A midnight confession over the phone, just to rub my nose in it," said Seabreeze.

"So he walks. Big deal. Somewhere down the road, God'll get him."

"I don't trust God to come through on some things," Seabreeze said. "And one of them is vengeance."

"Give the terrible, swift sword a chance before you knock it," said Coker and rang off.

If all he had going for him was God's random vengeance, then he was a pretty sad excuse for a cop. He should have stamped on his identification card *Professionally Impaired* so that future criminal suspects would know that Charlie Seabreeze was on the case and

therefore escaping justice and punishment was virtually assured.

By the time he'd shaved and showered it was twelve-thirty. He felt mad enough to bop down to Renaissance Park and arrest a few lunch-hour queers and sad enough to just sit down in the middle of his living room and work off the next three hours ramming a sharp stick into his ear.

Discreetly, he did neither. Instead, Seabreeze packed an athletic grip and drove downtown to the Police Athletic Club. In the lockerroom, he found an anonymous patrolman dressing up and pulling down from a top shelf in his locker a pair of handball gloves and a ball as black, firm and deadly as any hollow-point bullet.

"The name's Seabreeze," he said to the patrolman nicely, the vulture in his soul rising sharply. "Got a game?"

"Castleman," the young patrolman said and they shook hands. "I've got a court. I was just going to bat it around a little."

"Nonsense," Seabreeze said, hitching on his gloves like a western gunfighter itching for the showdown in the street. "Having an opponent sharpens your game. Let me just get an extra ball for warm-up . . ."

Seabreeze whipped the patrolman three straight: 21-3, 21-7, 21-5. Castleman seemed to sense he had been hung out as some kind of whipping boy, took the loss with good sportsmanship and hoped he'd catch Seabreeze on another afternoon when his opponent's temperament was less vicious and spiteful.

For the second time that day, Seabreeze showered. But this time he felt a little purged of the hatred he felt against Bain Thomas. He would have to trust that no fish slipped through the Great Fisherman's netting. And particularly those with the offensive aroma of Bain Thomas.

When he tossed his athletic bag into the rear seat of his car, the time was 3:46 p.m. He had an easy brace of time in which to drive the ten city blocks west to the Courts Building, park, comb his hair and straighten his necktie by four-thirty. He would be washed, shaven and neat. Judge Rostowitz would likely question whether Seabreeze was a stand-in imposter for the shabby, somewhat delinquent homicide detective he'd been warned about.

IT WAS WHILE SEABREEZE WAS APPROACHING YANKEE Avenue that he thought again of Bain Thomas' boastful dare to put his *sunblind-theory* to the test. "*You check it out yourself . . . Drive down Armory Avenue . . . Or Stenbaugh . . . the sun will have shifted on to the next group of skyscrapers . . .*"

He passed Yankee Avenue. It was entirely in shadows. Then, two blocks later, Armory. It, too, had seen the late-afternoon sun pass it by.

He knew the sun would be too low in the sky to make any display on the pavement and yet there was Stenbaugh Avenue just ahead, a temptress street luring him to take the long drive down.

He yielded to its temptation. Bain Thomas would have his way with him right to the bitter end, he would prove out his theory of murder like a final slap across the face . . .

Just ahead of him, no more than forty feet, was the marked crosswalk, a replica of all the others shoppers used to get from block to block via malls cut into their midsections so they would not have to waste steps trudging to distant corners.

Fifteen feet from the crosswalk Seabreeze slowed his speed to a crawl. He could *feel* the sun coming, *sense* it about to strike his eyes. His left hand was even releasing its grip on the steering wheel and rising to be used as a sunshield.

And then it came, as he knew it would come, blasting into his eyes with blinding light, Seabreeze's shielding palm the only safeguard against catastrophe, the same instinctive gesture Bain Thomas must have made at virtually the same place on Yankee Avenue.

But no, he'd been blinded by the sunlight.

And there it was, coming so suddenly Seabreeze's mind was sent reeling by its simplicity.

Bain Thomas' Catch-22.

AN UNEASINESS WAS BEGINNING TO WORK AT HIM NOW, one that told him there was grave danger in allowing Bain Thomas to run around loose, that something terrible could still happen. If he could murder his wife, then he was entirely capable of murdering her lover as well. He wanted to dispatch some patrol officers out to Thomas' home in Briar Hills, but for that he needed a warrant and for a warrant he needed hard evidence of murder, which for now was only a theory buzzing in his brain.

He made it the ten blocks to the Police Impound Garage in four minutes flat and called upstairs for a photographer, while he kept an alert eye on Bain Thomas' sleek BMW parked in a corner of the garage.

"No one's been inside that one since it was hauled in," the duty sergeant told Seabreeze. "The tech team made a thorough job of it on the outside like they always do, but since there wasn't no operator fatality, they just treated it like a hit-and-run abandoned."

"I'll need you as a witness for a deposition," Seabreeze told the

officer. "What's your first name, Sergeant Hoyt?"

"Sammy. Samuel, if you're going to get all formal on me."

Seabreeze jotted the name down in a notepad, just as a suit-and-tie stepped from a nearby elevator, camera gear slung from both shoulders. He walked quickly across the garage bay to the island office and stepped inside.

It was seven minutes until the four-thirty inquest.

"Showtime," said the suit-and-tie.

"I want a full set of glossies of the interior of that black BMW over there. And a Polaroid as evidence for a Murder One warrant."

"Ready whenever you are, C.B.," said the photog.

The threesome went back across the garage bay to the north corner.

"Sergeant, before you unlock the door, I want you both to observe the position of the sun visor on the driver's side. Your replies will constitute official statements. Sergeant Hoyt, in which position is the sun visor?"

"It's down, sir."

"And you? What's your name?"

"Detective Sergeant Appleton," said the photographer, as he began to unwind himself from his equipment.

"And the position of the visor?" said Seabreeze.

"The same, sir."

"Up or down, please."

"The visor is in the down-position, lieutenant."

"Okay, Hoyt, crack open that door. Appleton, make your first shot a Polaroid of that sun visor and feed it to me so I can run it upstairs to the courts."

Seabreeze had his Polaroid in moments.

"Now, hop into the back seat and give me one of the visor and the dashboard in the same shot, for reference and identification," Seabreeze said.

"Lotta camera work for just a sun visor," grumbled Appleton, as he got out of the BMW and re-entered it through a rear door.

"It isn't if you have to prove murder," Seabreeze told Appleton, as he accepted the detective's second photograph through the open front door on the driver's side. "Keep yourselves available for the next half-hour or so, just in case Judge Rostowitz wants statements before issuing the warrant."

Then, Seabreeze was off to the elevators in a sprint, his timing pretty good if the elevator didn't do any milk-run to the eighth floor.

But at the fifth floor where the Detective Divisions were housed, all hell seemed to be breaking loose. Two city prosecutors fell inside,

followed on their heels by enough homicide detectives to start a department in another city, who seemed to be bound for the tenth floor Jails.

"He's in custody, I tell you!" one of them—Orie Bissett—was screaming into the face of another, whose name escaped Seabreeze for the moment.

"Hey, the guy wasn't *charged* for that," said the one who was still nameless in Seabreeze's mind. "A coroner's inquest, that's all. We're wasting precious *time* here, Bissett. The guy's probably *at home right now*, stuffing a suitcase and phoning for airline tickets . . ."

Everybody seemed to be blowing his own horn here. One of the assistant prosecutors was of the strong opinion the courts would have the guy's home address, which was the direction in which they should be steaming. But the two detectives still held that the guy was an arrestee. Finally, one of the prosecutors recognized Seabreeze's face in the crowd.

"Seabreeze, isn't it? Didn't the courts assign you to look into this female traffic death? The Roxanne Thomas thing, just last week?"

"That's a bonafide homicide now," Seabreeze told them, seizing the opportunity to bring his own trumpet to his lips. He waved the Polaroids significantly. "A Catch-22. Thomas claimed he was blinded by the afternoon sun. If you don't buy that, then he had to see to kill her. So, he pulled the sun visor down. Only he forgot to return the visor to its *up-position* after he hit her. He became a victim of too much sun and it's going to get him swinging in the wind."

Seabreeze had a hunch it was Bain Thomas *they* were looking for, too and asked as much.

"That's the bird, all right," said Orie Bissett. "Another homicide last night, in Ravenna Park. White female, roughly thirty years. In an apartment unit across from the park. The victim's been made as Jo Ann Prather and we have her as being in attendance at the Roxanne Thomas funeral. She was hacked up with a kitchen knife. Time of death about ten p.m. stab wounds, slashes, elongations. A real maniac job."

Seabreeze closed his eyelids softly. The lover, of course. Bain Thomas had nearly told him as much over the phone the night before with his insane laughter, when Seabreeze had made the lame joke about going into his kitchen to inflict a few wounds upon himself with a carving knife . . .

●



## PURLOINED LETTER

To prove your answer find the letter  
A, B or C hidden in the drawing.



The pulp magazine  
'Spicy Mystery Stories'  
was published by ---  
A/ Culture Publications  
B/ Popular Publications  
C/ Fiction House

*Most people thought it was a terrible thing that had happened to the young girl, but one person knew it wasn't so terrible after all!*

# Home Preserves

by CHARLES WAGNER

COAT ON, BASKET IN HAND, MISS EMMA J. SCHULTE marched out of her home to begin her pre-Christmas deliveries. Ten little jars, ribbons and cards attached, were neatly bundled in the wicker hamper that swung from her arm. The temperature was in the mid-fifties—her arthritis would not act up until later, and by then the basket would be empty.

For ten years she had made her annual rounds, giving her jams and preserves to all her friends and neighbors, and they reciprocated by helping her with errands and other odd jobs. A spinster, she had little family. Her nephew Frank and his family were her only relations within three hundred miles.

One by one she visited each house on the list in her mind. The strain

on her arm eased and her heart rose as children and their mothers greeted her kindly at every stop. Mrs. Greene loved the strawberry jam. Mrs. Hauser and her two boys were more than pleased with the grape jelly. Mrs. Hansen gratefully accepted the red plum preserves.

"I never told you how sorry I was to hear that your little grandniece—about your grandniece's death," Mrs. Hansen said, clutching the jar.

Emma nodded. "Seems hard to believe it's been six months."

"Will Frank and his wife be having Christmas dinner with you?"

"Yes, I'm looking forward to it . . . he still has his oldest daughter."

"Of course," Mrs. Hansen said. She hunted for more to say. "Thank you for the lovely preserves—and have a merry Christmas!"

"The same to you." Emma turned and walked away.

"Mrs. Hansen closed the door and hurried to the window watching to see that the old woman safely negotiated the stone path to the sidewalk. Her husband joined her.

"There she goes—the nutty ole bag," he said.

"James! That's not very nice. She has almost no family. And after what happened to that darling niece . . ."

"Yeah, I know," he said somberly. He took the jar from her hand. "Well, she sure does make good jam!"

His wife nodded. "Best in town."

NEAR DUSK, EMMA SCHULTE SAT ALONE IN HER LIVING room. The hall clock ticked loudly. Late afternoon sun streamed through the windows, striking the photos on the mantel: pictures of her sister and nephew, her grandnieces. Additional grandniece portraits adorned her lamp table.

The TV was on with the sound turned down. She stared at it briefly and turned it off.

She got up, went to the cellar door, flicked on the light, and trudged down the stairs. Near the landing, jam simmered in a large kettle on her beloved gas stove. The electric range upstairs, a gift from her nephew, she only used for meals.

She walked slowly, passing jars that dotted shelves that covered the dank, blue, concrete walls. Strawberry, peach, and cherry preserves; grape and currant jellies; plum and berry jams . . .

It was so terrible about her grandniece. The police had called it murder and blamed a mysterious, knife-wielding fiend, who had slashed and hid the body.

The fruit preserves gave way to watermelon pickles, meat relish, and

chutney; whole gherkins and bread-and-butter slices; beef and chicken aspic. She paused to examine the latest batch of fall cucumbers.

It had been an accident. Emma had seen little Lori playing alone in the park after sunset. (And why not! Night or day, Halton, Kansas was a perfectly safe town.) From her porch, she had watched her grandniece swinging on the playground as the summer fireflies flickered around her.

Lori fell and Emma had rushed to her. It had seemed like such a mild accident, but the little girl was dead before she reached her. She had wanted to scream or run for help, but instead, she had embraced the child, holding her own aching chest, and drawn her away out of sight.

Emma replaced the jar of pickles and turned to the door next to her. A padlock hung from the latch.

That night she had gone to her house, fetched her kitchen tools, and returned to the woods near the swing set. She had wept as she worked. Wept for the fact that she was old and weak, and Lori was almost eleven and *heavy*. Wept because her nephew, dear Frank, would wail and wring his hands at the thought of his daughter murdered and no body to bury.

But she had calmed herself. Murder was more understandable than such a freakish mishap. If one had to lose a child, it was best to have something besides a slick, swing seat to blame . . .

Emma drew a key from her apron, unlocked the door and walked inside. A light cord dangled in the center of the dark room. She pulled it.

The little space shimmered with blue luminescence. The far wall was bare. An old, empty bathtub sat against one side, a vat next to it. The left-hand wall contained shelves with more jars. Big jars, the biggest she used. Jars filled with clear, brown, and red liquid; pickled feet and hands; jellied organs. One jar whose contents smiled warmly out at Aunt Emma.

She closed the door. *Everyone knows I'm the best home-preserver in town*, she thought, gathering her utensils together. *Who needs an undertaker!*

She inspected each jar one last time, assuring herself the ingredients had set long enough. Then she twisted off the lids.

"Merry Christmas, Lori!" she said aloud, then filled the tub with broth and took out her sewing kit. ●

*Why is she here? I wonder. Why is my baby in an asylum?*

# Black and White

by EVAN BALDWIN

AS I ENTER THE ASYLUM, I CAN HEAR SCREAMS COMING from behind the closed doors. The asylum is depressing, for it is white, totally white. The walls are white, the desk is white, all the receptionists are white.

I feel out of place here, me, a black woman in the midst of all this white. I don't even know why Janine is here. When she called me and told me to come to Philadelphia, I was thrilled. But this exhilaration turned to horror when she told me she was in an asylum.

The only thing not white here is the room numbers. I finally reach 341 and get the doctor to let me in. I have to stifle a cry of anguish when I first see her. She is twitching nervously, and her eyes are very red from crying.

The doctor closes the door and we are alone. This sound causes her to turn and look at me. "Oh mama, oh mama!" she cries, and I rush to her side and embrace her. I don't quite know how to ask her wha.

happened. She seems to sense this in my face and begins to speak.

"Me and Tyrone were driving along the highway going to visit Aunt Louise. The engine started to give out and we pulled off the road. It was drizzling, but he got out and checked under the hood. He said something about needing a belt or something, I don't remember. I begged him to wait, but he said he would walk and try to find a gas station. Suzette was with us, and he told me to lock the doors and don't open them for anybody."

Janine breaks down, sobbing uncontrollably. Tears flood from her beautiful black eyes. Saying nothing, I try to comfort her. Sometime later, she resumes her story.

"About a half hour later, a van full of white teenagers pulled up. They asked me what I was doing. I told them my husband went to the gas station and he'd be back soon. They kept telling me to open the door and let them help me, but I told them no, Tyrone said not to open it for anybody."

At this point it seems as if she could break down again, but she controls her tears and continues her story.

"They left, but after about twenty minutes they were back. They had a McDonald's bag and told me they had gotten something for me and Suzette to eat. I told them to just leave the bag on the hood, but they insisted on my opening the door so they could give it to me. I still refused, so they put it on the hood and left again."

At this point she seems to be in a trance. I snap her out of it by saying "Go on Janine, go on."

"An hour later a highway patrolman came. I rolled down the window and sat there telling him what happened; he just stood there unmoving. He asked me what the bag was and I told him some kids went and got some McDonald's food for me. He went to the bag and brought it back. He told me I looked like I could use something to eat. He opened it and . . ."

Now Janine is having a fit. I hold her tightly, trying unsuccessfully to control her. I press the red button, the only thing not white in the room except for me and my daughter, and orderlies come pouring in. They strap her to a table and wheel her out.

I am wondering if something about the bag made her freak out, or was it just the remembrance of what happened. I try to figure out the rest of the story but can't. Why is my baby in an insane asylum?

Then I hear Janine screaming from down the hall, "Oh mama, mama! It was his head! It was Tyrone's head!"

●

## 007 QUIZ

What was the first movie in which Roger Moore appeared as British secret agent 007?

*The ninth James Bond movie, Live and Let Die, in 1973.*

★ ★ ★

Sean Connery returned to the screen as 007 in *Never Say Never Again*. This 1983 movie was a remake of what previous Bond movie?

*The movie was based on the 1965 Thunderball, in which Connery also starred.*

★ ★ ★

Which of these actresses—Honor Blackman, Diana Rigg, Jill St. John, Lana Wood, Linda Thorson, Ursula Andress, Lois Maxwell, Joanna Lumley, and Shirley Eaton—has not appeared in a James Bond movie?

*Former Avengers girl Linda Thorson has not appeared with 007.*

★ ★ ★

Roger Moore appeared in what television series in the sixties as a dashing adventurer?

*He portrayed Simon Templar, The Saint.*

★ ★ ★

Who is Sir Miles Messervy, K.C.M.G.?

*He is M, James Bond's boss.*

The female character Domino appeared in what two 007 films?

*She was the love interest in Thunderball and its remake, Never Say Never Again.*

★ ★ ★

Name all the Bond Films in which George Lazenby appeared as 007.

*Lazenby portrayed the secret agent in only one film, On Her Majesty's Secret Service.*

★ ★ ★

What brand automobile did James Bond drive that had revolving license plates, retractable bullet-proof window shields, a radar screen, a fog thrower, and twin Browning machine guns mounted behind the parking lights?

*The vehicle was an Aston Martin DB 5 sports car.*

★ ★ ★

In the movie *Goldfinger* how many seconds remained on the atomic bomb in Fort Knox before it was stopped?

*The counter registered double-oh-seven when it was shut off.*

★ ★ ★

Pick out the good guy from the villains: Dr. No, Ernst Blofeld, Emilio Largo, Tiger Tanaka, Auric Goldfinger, Oddjob, Rosa Klebb.

*The good guy is Tiger Tanaka, from You Only Live Twice.*

★ ★ ★



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CHARLES WAGNER (*Home Preserves*) tells us:

I was born December 8, 1957 in Beloit, Kansas, where I lived until my graduation from high school. I received a degree in electrical engineering from the University of Kansas in 1979 and began work with the Boeing Company in Wichita. Quickly tiring of engineering, I took writing classes in my spare time and finally moved to Torrance, CA in 1982 where I began writing stories in earnest. My first professional sale was to Pacific Comics, in the yet-to-appear #9 issue of *Twisted Tales*. "Home Preserves" marks my second sale—and possibly my first appearance as of this writing. Presently I live in Los Angeles with my wife, Margaret Coleman, who also writes.

★ ★ ★

from IZAK BOUWER (*The Vertebrae of a Long Snake*):

Born in South Africa, 1933; married, four children; professor, department of mathematics, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, N.B., Canada E3B 5A3; published various research papers in graph theory and combinatorics; co-author of a paper on William Blake: "The Mental Traveller: Man's Eternal Journey," *Blake* 47 (1978-79). pp 184-192.

★ ★ ★

WILLIAM E. CHAMBERS (*Night Service*) writes:

I've had two books published: DEATH TOLL, a seaside resort murder mystery, Popular Library, 1976; and THE REDEMPTION FACTOR, a novel about child prostitution published in 1980 by Fawcett Popular Library.

I've had stories in the May 1972, May 1976, and July 1977 issues of MSMM, and one in the June 1976 AHMM. Also a story in TRICKS AND TREATS, the 1976 MWA anthology.

I am currently working on another suspense novel. I write part time only because I have a position as District Steward with local 1101, Communication Works of America within the New York Telephone Company, and I've just opened a Victorian style bar restaurant in Greenpoint Brooklyn known as Chambers Pub.

★ ★ ★

EVAN BALDWIN (*Black and White*) informs us:

I am sixteen years old and hope someday to become a professional writer. I go to Mainland Senior High School here in Daytona Beach, Florida. During the 1983-1984 school year I won third place in the school for my fiction story, "Black and White."

★ ★ ★

# Stiff Competition

BOOK REVIEWS by JOHN BALL

A remarkable picture of today's Italy, and an authoritative one, fills every page of *The Year of the Gun* by Michael Mewshaw. This is much more than a "mystery story," this is a novel that holds all the ingredients of literature. An American journalist living in Rome without official approval is working for a small and not too reputable paper when he runs afoul of a violent terrorist organization. Then an aggressive female photojournalist appears who is determined to penetrate the Red Brigades and get a story. The people live in this book and the terror that surrounds them never lets up. Yet it all rings true; which is perhaps the most terrifying thing of all. An exceptional book by a highly qualified novelist. (Atheneum, \$14.95)

★ ★ ★

Reginald Hill, who is building a solid reputation in the crime writing field, adds to it with his latest, *Deadheads*. At stake is a traditional British manor and its superlative rose garden. Unfortunately, people have a habit of being killed there and the police, in the persons of Inspectors Dalziel and Pascoe, look into the matter. There are many ingenious plot twists and some very enjoyable reading before the matter is resolved. Obviously more is at stake than the welfare of a rose garden, but it still remains a key element in the story. This is a good classic British mystery written in modern style with lots of movement and unanticipated developments. (Macmillan, \$12.95)

★ ★ ★

Josh Pachter has put together an interesting anthology called *Top Crime*. In it there are twenty-four stories selected by their authors as their best, with the added feature of an introduction to each one by the authors themselves. This provides a good look not only at the authors' work, but also how they practice their profession. The names are all top drawer and the entertainment level high. Recommended. (St. Martin's, \$14.95)

★ ★ ★

Unusually good is K.C. Constantine's *Always a Body to Trade*. We missed its hard cover appearance (by Godine), but it is now available in paperback from Penguin. Some excellent elements are put together to tell the story of a good cop in a fairly small city who has to deal with a new young mayor who is a health freak and a black "minister" who is the town vice lord and at the same time his best ally. You'll like this one. (Penguin, \$3.50)

★ ★ ★

William Campbell Gault is well established in the crime writing field. In his latest *Death in Donegal Bay*, experienced private eye Brook Callahan worries about a young colleague he recommended for a job where he may be in over his head. This is an interesting work, but Mr. Gault is not, in this instance, at the top of his form. (Walker, \$12.95)

★ ★ ★

Walk into almost any chain bookstore today, look for the mystery section, and you will find Dorothy L. Sayers. This despite the fact that she has not been with us for some time and Lord Peter Wimsey is not always admirable, particularly in dealing with underlings. Nevertheless, Miss Sayers' popularity blooms undiminished. Now, thanks to the Kent State University Press, there is a new item. Two of Miss Sayers' plays are put together in one volume. *Busman's Holiday*, the first, is offered here in its original form; later Miss Sayers rewrote it as a novel. The second play, *Love All*, is a drawing room comedy, here published for the first time. It is built on the battle of the sexes and, as might be expected, the distaff side comes off the winner. It was produced in London but had only a limited run. The manuscript was found among Miss Sayers' papers. Enough has been said to insure that Sayers fans and mystery collectors will want this well-produced volume post haste. It is \$19.95 today; tomorrow it will probably be much more. (Kent State University Press, Kent, Ohio 45242)

★ ★ ★

A highly improbable, and definitely funny caper, makes up the context of Jay Cronley's *Cheap Shot*. How do you rob a museum rich with treasure and with a sophisticated alarm system that rings right in police headquarters? Easy: you first go to the station and kidnap all the cops. Store them in a moving van and then go about the heist, bringing the cops along as a matter of convenience. After that it gets a little crazy. If wild and wooly adventure is your dish, here you are. (Atheneum, \$13.95)

★ ★ ★

The Popular Culture Press is continuing its fine series of studies of mystery/suspense literature. The latest to appear is *Twelve Englishmen of Mystery*. Under the editorship of Earl F. Bagninier a group of individual critics has provided essays on the work of such notables as Wilkie Collins, H. C. Bailey, Michael Gilbert, Jilian Symons, H. R. F. Keating and others. The literature about crime fiction is growing steadily; the Popular Culture Press is clear leader in the field. The address is Bowling Green, Ohio 43403. (\$22.95 in hard cover; \$11.95 in trade paperback)

★ ★ ★

This month's Sherlockian item is exceptional. It's called *The Baker Street Reader*. In celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Baker Street Irregulars, editor Philp A. Shreffler has put together a superb collection of memorable writings about the Canon. The bylines represent the very best of this famous organization. Here is a book destined to become a fundamental item in the literature; get it while you can before its price becomes astronomical. The names are many and legendary in the fine volume. The most distinguished is Franklin D. Roosevelt, B.S.I.; the least important, your respectful reporter. (Greenwood Press, 88 Post Road West, Westport, CT 06881. \$27.50)

★ ★ ★

PAPERBACK NOTES: . . . One of the best books in a long time is Barbara Moore's *The Doberman Wore Black*, which introduces Gordon Christy, D.V.M. It's a Murder Ink Mystery offered by Dell in paperback at \$2.95 . . . Actor George Kennedy's second mystery novel, *Murder on High*, is now available from Avon for \$3.75 . . . The increasingly popular M.M. Kaye, who wrote *The Far Pavilions*, offers *Death in Kenya* in a St. Martin's paperback at \$3.95. Warning: this book was previously published under the title *Later Than You Think* . . . One of Arthur Upfield's splendid Australian mysteries, *The Bone*

is *Pointed*, is offered by Scribners in paperback for \$3.95. This title is usually hard to find . . . The Walker British Mystery series continues with two established ladies: Elizabeth Lemarchand's *Cyanide with Compliments* and Josephine Bell with two titles, *Stroke of Death* and *Wolf! Wolf!* These are \$2.95 each in uniform covers . . . Thomas Altman's *Dark Places* is for the ladies. It's about a woman whose happy marriage is suddenly beset with outsiders and an apparently terrible secret her husband is keeping from her. From Bantam at \$3.50 . . . Eric Sauter received an Edgar nomination for his *Hunter*. Now the writer/detective is back in *Hunter and the Raven*, an original from Avon. There are some stock characters, but the whole thing moves swiftly and tightly. \$3.25 . . . An exceptionally fine police procedural laid in Houston is David L. Lindsey's *A Cold Mind*. This is a real chiller (no pun intended) that offers some genuinely exciting entertainment. Now available from Pocket Books at \$3.95. Don't miss this one . . . Collier Books has made available two of the John Dickson Carr classics, *The Corpse in the Waxworks*, and *The Crooked Hinge* for \$3.50. Carr was one of the all time greats, the master of the locked room and the impossible crime. Plus which he was a fine technician with words . . . Charlotte MacLeod writes for women, but many men also enjoy her work. Avon now has her *Something the Cat Dragged in* for \$3.75. The cover art, while it doesn't fit the text, is delightfully grim . . . Scribners is keeping Philo Vance alive with a new edition of *The Kennel Murder Case*. Five other Vance cases are also available, the Bishop, Benson, Canary, Greene, and Scarab. The latest one is \$3.95; we don't have the price on the others. ●



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**STATE** \_\_\_\_\_ **ZIP** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please print**

